

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH AND THE AGING

A Developmental Study

by

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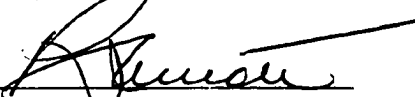
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ABSTRACT

The Christian community has had a deep concern for the needy from its earliest days. The roots of the United Methodist Church are no exception. It is in this ministry we find the beginning of the work of the Church with the aging. However, during the more recent years this ministry has moved from the poor and needy elderly to serving a new segment of our society who are elderly, some of whom are poor and needy, but others who also need a unique ministry for other reasons. This study has sought to trace the development of this type of ministry through the years of the United Methodist Church, and its predecessors, the Methodist Church, the Evangelical Church and the United Brethren in Christ. A study was made of all the General Conference actions of these three branches of the Church from their beginnings, noting those which related in some way to the work with the aging. The development of the homes for the aged was also studied, mainly through direct contact with all of the listed homes of the United Methodist Church, seeking information from them concerning their recorded histories, and how they have changed their work and their approach during the years of their existence.

The concluding facet of this developmental study was the investigation into the present work with the aging in

selected local congregations throughout the United Methodist Church. District Superintendents in every Annual Conference were asked to indicate from one to three such churches with recognized work with the elderly. Fifty-two local churches responded to the inquiry. The results of this study are included in the materials.

From the study of the United Methodist Church in its ministry to the aging, several conclusions can be drawn. Beginning with the concept that the aging were a part of the sub-section of work with the poor and needy, this ministry is beginning to take on the position that it has a legitimate place in its own right. There is still much of the old concepts holding work with the aging from developing more fully. Too much of the "Three-H Syndrome" persists, even within the Church, that if the needs of the elderly are met in the areas of health care, adequate housing, and hobbies (leisure time activities), then the needs of the elderly have been cared for. The Church has not been seen in this study as having come to grips with the need of the elderly to develop a sound theology and philosophy of life in the older years.

The development of work with the aging in the United Methodist Church has shown signs of promise. Change is everywhere present. However, more emphasis needs to be placed on the "why" of life in the later years rather than merely seeking to do what the secular society does in meeting physical needs. We call the United Methodist Church,

and all of the Christian bodies, to accept the role of value
setters for the day in which we live, and the expanding days
ahead for the elderly.

INTRODUCTION

One of the fastest developing areas of concern within the United Methodist Church is that of the needs of the aging. Not that the needs have just recently appeared nor that the Church has been inactive until recently with the problems of this segment of our population. The current surge has been brought about by the rather sudden expansion of the numbers and percentages of the elderly within our society today. The numbers are also augmented by the radical change in the life style of the current aged in our midst and the expectations of those aged persons. This rather sudden alteration has demanded adjustments within all segments of the society, including the Church. In the pressure of such conditions there has been much good and much questionable in the response. The Church needs to rethink its position within all of this change.

The Church cannot let itself become trapped into the "Three-H Syndrome" which has been too readily accepted by much of society, especially governmental agencies. This is a mentality and planning which believes the major needs of the elderly are found in the areas of Health, Housing, and Hobbies (leisure time). If only we will provide the older members of our society, goes the concept, with good health at a reasonable rate, and assure housing to all of our eld-

erly that is in accordance with a pre-determined standard, and if those who are not employed have free time activities to fill the hours, then we will have provided for this new claim for life. Without denying the validity of these three H's, the Church must see itself in a different relationship both to our society and to that part of our community which is forming the elderly bulge.

The position of the Church comes from a theological stance based on that which is understood to be the total will of God for all of His creation. We will be noting the positive and negative statements in the Scriptures concerning old age which have greatly influenced the attitudes and programs of the Church over these many years. The response of the United Methodist Church, and its predecessors, will be followed through the years and the development and adjustments will be indicated. How much of this has been the result of its theological convictions must be, of necessity, only surmised at times.

The call coming to the United Methodist Church today concerning the needs of that segment of our society already in, as well as those approaching, later age, is two-fold. One is to guide, as well as participate in, the meeting of the more obvious needs of the elderly under the Three-H Syndrome. We must be sure these needs are adequately met in the best possible way. The second is to be the source of guidance to the elderly in the areas of value clarification

and life goals. This cannot be delegated to governmental or social service agencies. In order to discover models of response to the needs of the older adults through local United Methodist Churches, 90 congregations were identified and invited to outline their programs. These findings will be reported in Chapter Five.

The value of personhood at any age and the projection of life goals is a basic element of the experience of the elderly, based firmly on the theological understandings of our faith. Within this concern must also come the understanding that the elderly are now facing inner adjustments as well as external adjustments much wider than the adjustments of previous generations which centered almost exclusively in a rapidly approaching death. Calling the United Methodist Church to this ministry for today and the future will evolve from the study of both its past and its present.

Chapter One

THE THEOLOGICAL PREMISE

It has been almost two thousand years since Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."¹ The relationship of this statement to the factor and quality of life of one in the upper years of age may not be easy to identify. This would be true whether one were considering either the secular or the religious dimension of existence. The voice of the Hebrew-Christian heritage has not always been ringing a clear call concerning aging, as a review of both the Old and New Testaments will indicate. There are those passages which celebrate the honor and glory of the elderly, but it is also true that the process of aging has often been seen as an event to be avoided if possible, to be dreaded by many, and to be endured at best. The writer of Old Testament wisdom indicates that which has been a part of so much of the thinking of mankind for long generations concerning advancing age:

Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when you will say, "I have no pleasure in them"; before the sun and the light, and the moon, and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain; in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and

¹ John 10:10b, The Bible, Revised Standard Version (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1953).

those that look through the windows are dimmed, and the doors on the street are shut; when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the voice of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low; they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along and desire fails; because man goes to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets; before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity.²

The Christian faith is called upon to give a statement concerning the meaning of growing older. Is the approach and experience of the Christian to aging that of despair and uselessness or is it a part of continuing abundant life? The Church has had this dilemma before it from its early days. If we believe the purpose of Jesus was for all people, and not only to bring hope and promise to the young or perhaps those of mid-years, then the position stated by the writer of Ecclesiastes might be one of rather accurate reporting but not necessarily one of total meaning. The fact of physical deterioration related to the aging process cannot be denied, especially when one observes the conditions of life before the current medical skills of the developed societies were available, as well as in locations throughout the world today where such skills are still lacking and life expectancy is low. Does this, then, equate the abundant life promised by Jesus only with physical well-being? Are

²Ecclesiastes 12:1-8 (RSV).

those of any age who are deprived of physical health outside a fullness offered by God? Does our faith have anything to say to these concerns?

THE NEGATIVE VIEW

There is the possibility of reading the scriptures in such a way as to develop an acceptable negative premise in the Christian faith concerning aging. The Psalmist indicates so much of this attitude carried forward through our heritage for now many generations. Psalm 90:10 states, "The years of our life are threescore and ten, or even by reason of strength fourscore; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away."³ This concept of life is not foreign to a great many of our elderly today, nor is it a foreign concept to a great many of those of younger years in the Church as well. Again the Psalmist indicates that which often happens to the elderly when he said, "Do not cast me off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength is spent."⁴ Nor does the quote above taken from the book of Ecclesiastes leave one with any positive view of the aging experience or of any faith in God by which these experiences may be met effectively. Such reference could well have been written from the viewpoint of today in so many instances.

The concept of the useless elderly has been growing as society has become more oriented to a "throw-away" mentality

³ (RSV)

⁴ Ibid.

for all that it no longer desired, including persons. Technical and industrialized societies have increasingly become enamored of the new, believing the old, even in persons, is not good nor desirable. What, if anything, does our theology have to say to such positions? Is the attitude of the Church any different from that of the general society? Is there a theological premise which will offer a sound approach to a positive view of aging through the Church? If the Church has a positive response, this response must needs be from a strong theological stance that is more than mere emotionalism or the sense that all is not as it should be and so there is an answer somewhere, even though we do not see how God is leading.

THE POSITIVE STATEMENT

There is a theological stance which gives to the process and reality of aging a positive statement within the Faith. The Church does have a positive theology to offer those who would see advanced age as rendering a person useless. This is found in two basic positions. The one related specifically to the continuing value of life for every individual. The other deals with the character of the Christian community and how that community sees the aged within itself.

The first is the concept of the Abundant Life, indicated in John 10:10 noted earlier. The statement, "I have come that men may have life, and may have it in all its

fullness,"⁵ Jesus was addressing the needs of every person to the abundant life which God has intended. This life was to come through the faithfulness of Jesus in fulfilling his intended ministry. He refers to himself as the "good shepherd" in comparison with the leadership being given to the people through the religious leaders of his day. The message which had been coming through these religious leaders had not been one of true hope, nor had it accurately reflected the intention of God for His creation. Although the teaching of the Good Shepherd does not directly concern itself with the problems of aging, the truth of the concern is certainly intended for everyone of any chronological age or physical condition. Jesus states that it was for the securing of this fullest life in every person that he came into the world. This would indicate the utmost value in every life, even though by some human standards these values would have wide variations. In the concept of life given by Jesus we are called to consider whether, in God's sight, the young, vigorous college graduate well prepared to tackle the weighty problems of the times is of greater worth before God than the elderly person with dimmed eyes and failing strength who may have had menial work for forty years before a poverty level retirement. This concept of "abundant living" through the offer of Jesus as the Good Shepherd also seeks to reach to the self-debasing response of the aged who was once

⁵The New English Bible (New York: Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, 1961.

active and sharing vitally in life, who now is confined to home or bed and wishes for death to be the release from a life no longer seen as of value to anyone, either self or society.

The promise of God that has been with mankind from of old still speaks of love and care: "I am your God and will take care of you until you are old and your hair is gray. I made you and will care for you; I will give you help and rescue you."⁶ The people of God had lost their relationship with the Babylonian gods whom they had accepted as means of help. God was seeking to assure them that they were the product of his creative power and that He would care for them all of their lives, whether they recognized this care or not. The total span of life is upheld by God's grace and strength, and this continually. This has not always been the position even of those who consider themselves "God's people." In response to this sense of lostness, the Church has the opportunity to proclaim what makes life abundant from God's view, not from human interpretation. Historically, as we shall indicate later, this has not been done particularly well by the Church. If there is to be an effective and honest theological position on the issue of aging, then it is not only valid, but vital for the Church to believe Jesus did not have an age limit in mind in promising "life in all its fullness."

⁶Isaiah 46:4, The Bible in Today's English Version (New York: American Bible Society, 1976).

The second theological premise concerning the positive statement of the Church relative to aging deals with the nature of the Christian community in its internal concepts. It is essential that a life of value and meaning, no matter the age, is in need of being a part of a supportive community. Several indications are noted in the earlier chapters of the Acts of the Apostles concerning the nature of the early Church in community functions. Recognizing that the needs of one must be seen as the needs of all, a communal response to possessions came to dominate, as is recorded in Acts 2:43ff and 4:32ff. In the first passage the believers sold their possessions and divided the proceeds within the fellowship so that those in need would have sufficient. In the latter reference the point is again made that all property was held in common and that through the generosity of all, there was not a single person in need within the fellowship. Later in the account when arguments arose concerning the equal treatment of the needy, reference to the widows would not necessarily indicate the care of the aged, but would certainly not exclude such concerned response. The continuing concept of the early Church for the mutual help is reflected in Peter's first letter as he admonishes the Christian communities, and especially the leaders, scattered across Asia Minor, "Tend that flock of God whose shepherds you are, and do it, not under compulsion, but of your own

free will, as God would have it."⁷ To be willing shepherds of the whole flock, regardless of age, has been the work to which the Church has been called through all its years.

There is another dimension of the nature of the Christian community which includes the respect of the elderly, not just their care. Leviticus 19:32 admonishes, "You shall rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God."⁸ The writer of this Old Testament wisdom and directive indicates that God has no intention of casting the elderly into a position of disrespect. Paul, years later, seeks to guide young Timothy in dealing with the elderly in the community in much the same vein when he advised, "Never be harsh with an elder; appeal to him as if he were your father. Treat the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, and the younger as your sisters, in all purity."⁹ This view of the relationship of the elderly to the entire community of faith is also a part of the theological position of the Christian faith. This matter of respect for the elder is, however, a two-way street. In writing to Titus, Paul outlines rather pointedly the kind of conduct that is becoming for the older Christian in personal and community life. This life-style for the older Christian looks like this:

Let the older men know that they should be sober, high-principled, and temperate, sound in faith, in love, and in endurance. The older women, similarly, should be reverent in their bearing, not scandal-

⁷I Peter 5:2 (NEB). ⁸(RSV). ⁹I Timothy 5:1 (NEB).

mongers or slaves to strong drink; they must set a high standard, and school the younger women to be loving wives and mothers, temperate, chaste, and kind, busy at home, respecting the authority of their own husbands. Thus the Gospel will not be brought into disrepute.¹⁰

Even in Paul's time the argument would seem to have been valid that an older person who is not setting a good example is one whom it would be difficult to honor. The challenge and the responsibility for the consideration of the aged within the Christian community is not all laid on the younger members of the Church.

THE STANCE OF LOVE

Within and underlying these theological premises is the intent and desire of the Christian to express love for God and utilize that expression of love in the interpersonal relationships of daily life. The elderly in our midst will surely be included in such an expression. John brings this into excellent focus when he said,

If a man says, "I love God" while hating his brother, he is a liar. If he does not love the brother whom he has seen, it cannot be that he loves God whom he has not seen. And indeed this command comes to us from Christ himself: that he who loves God must also love his brother.¹¹

The greatest theological premise for our approach to the aged within our midst is love, both divine-human, and human-human.

In order to fulfill that which we say we believe about life in Christ as it would apply to the aging process and

¹⁰ Titus 2:2-5 (NEB).

¹¹ I John 4:20-21 (NEB).

the aged persons, the Church is called to be in ministry to the elderly because Christ offered to everyone, regardless of chronological age, an abundant life. God offers a total span of life which is filled with His purpose and His presence and His victory. The Church is also called to be in this ministry to the aged because these are also a part of the community of faith, a part of the flock to be shepherded. The Church is called to be in ministry to those in advanced years because the response of every Christian to God's love is to love our brothers and sisters whomever they are, including both the unlovely and the lovely who are aged.

Chapter Two

THE HISTORY OF CONCERN

Out of the theological understandings which we have noted, the Christian Church has always expressed a concern for those who were aged. However, the concern evidenced itself in various ways throughout the years, depending on circumstances which changed from time to time. One of these variables throughout the two thousand years of the Christian Gospel has been the percentage of the aged in the society. Echoing the presence of the poor, the aged have also been with us constantly. When one reviews the references in the Old Testament, even accepting the differences possibly present in the reckoning of age, it would indicate the presence of the very old in that day. In Deuteronomy 31:1ff it is noted that Moses was 120 years old when he relinquished the leadership of the Hebrew people to Joshua as the Promised Land was in sight. The record in I Samuel Chapters 2 and 4 tells of Eli being 58 years old when he became priest of the Israelites, and continuing in that role for 40 years, or until he was 98 years old. The Judeo-Christian heritage has always had the elderly in its midst.

The stance of the religious community toward the aged was normally that of giving honor to those of long life, seen especially as the source of wisdom. Even though we do

not read many references to the elderly infirm in ancient writings, there were those in the society, knowing the level of medical practice being followed at that time, as well as skeletal remains which have been found. The reference noted in Psalm 71 to the fear of being abandoned in feeble old age may well indicate a condition more general than one would like to admit.

When the heritage of the United Methodist Church is traced to the early days of the Wesleyan Movement, and the work of the three Wesleyan groups now comprising this denomination, one finds little direct reference to any specific concern for the aged as such. For a great while the concerns were for all who were in need, without reference to the particular age of the needy. Life was seen as more of a continuum with little to indicate the passage from one age period to another. There was no understanding of retirement as advancing a person into old age. Essentially there were two ways of ceasing employment: when a person's health no longer permitted the continuation of employment, or when a person was financially capable of living without additional earned income. It was assumed a person's family cared for one who did not fall in the latter category, but who could no longer continue gainful employment. There did seem to be sufficient support in the theology of the Protestant Ethic to warrant such a position. As the awareness of the Church and the needs of the people developed, there arose a more obvious need for some assistance following retirement among

those who had given their lives in the service of the Church. As we will note later, homes of modest scope were begun, often for retired missionaries, for they were returning to the homeland after years in which they had no opportunity to acquire property for their later years. These homes gradually expanded into residences for retired ministers, and finally into homes for others in the churches who were in financial need. It would be many years later that homes would be developed for those who desired alternate living arrangements in their elderly years and who could afford to pay for such care. The development of a concept of a ministry to the elderly beyond the provision of good housing and health care came very late in the history of the Church. In many respects, it is just now being developed. The scope of this chapter will be to follow this development in the early years of the Methodist Church, the Evangelical Church and the United Brethren in Christ prior to 1900.

THE EARLY WESLEYAN APPROACH

Much of the approach to the ministry to the aging in the early days of the Wesleyan Movement can be illustrated with a review of the life of the founder, John Wesley. He knew personally what it meant to face the necessities of daily life during the years of aging, for his life spanned almost the entire eighteenth century. He was born in 1703 and died in 1791. Some of the smallest details and intimate thoughts of Wesley's life have been preserved for us through

his Journal which extended from 1735 until late 1790, practically all of the years of his adult life. In these recordings there never was an indication that age alone should determine the activity or usefulness of an individual. John Wesley's years from age 65 to 80, when we have come to consider life to be slowing down or becoming less useful, showed little change in activities or directions. His recognition of advancing age is noted in his rejoicing that God had given him such good health year after year. His notation in the Journal of June 28, 1786, states:

I entered into the eighty-third year of my age. I am a wonder to myself. It is now twelve years since I have felt any such sensations as weariness. I am never tired (such is the goodness of God) either with writing, preaching, or traveling.¹

This is not to say that Wesley was unresponsive to the needs of those who were less fortunate physically in their elderly years. He indicated a visit he made to a friend one day.

I spent a little time in a visit to Mr. M___; twenty years ago he was a zealous and useful magistrate, now a picture of human nature in disgrace; feeble in body and mind, slow of speech and of understanding. Lord, let me not live to be useless!²

Even with this evidence of responsiveness, there is a total silence in the Journal respecting any organized work to relieve the needs of such aged people.

Throughout the development of the Wesleyan Movement

¹Percy L. Parker, ed., The Journal of John Wesley (Chicago: Moody Press, n.d.), p. 396.

²Ibid., p. 268.

however, there are numerous references indicating response to the condition of the needy. Very early in the life of the United Societies, as the Wesleyans were first called, John Wesley appealed to the little bands to give for the poor and needy. In 1741 he admonished the fellowship:

I reminded the United Society that many of our brethren and sisters had not needful food; many were destitute of convenient clothing; many were out of business, and that without their own fault; and many sick and ready to perish; that I had done what in me lay to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to employ the poor, and to visit the sick; but was not, alone, sufficient for these things; and therefore desired all those hearts were as my heart;

1. To bring what clothes each could spare to be distributed among those that wanted most.
2. To give weekly a penny, or what they could afford, for the relief of the poor and sick.³

Since there is little concept of "retirement" in John Wesley's writings, or in the thinking of that day, it would follow that many of the poor and sick, as well as those seeking employment, would be in the category we would see as aged. Twelve women were appointed by Wesley to visit the needy regularly and to provide what was needed, and then to meet every Tuesday evening to report on the conditions they had found and to recommend further action.⁴

The necessity of a Christian to be responsive to the needy was one of the cardinal concepts of Wesley. In an entry dated February 8, 1753, he wrote in his Journal:

In the afternoon I visited many of the sick; but such scenes, who could be unmoved? There are

³Ibid., p. 89.

⁴Ibid.

none such to be found in a pagan country. If any of the Indians in Georgia were sick (which indeed exceeding rarely happened till they learned gluttony and drunkenness from the Christians), those that were near gave him whatever he wanted. Oh, who will convert the English into honest heathens!⁵

When he was 82 years of age, Wesley was still actively going out begging for the poor.⁶ In Wesley's eyes there were not the needy aged, only the needy (some of whom were aged).

John Wesley did at least once make a direct reference to the manner in which the elders were to be seen in society. It was a rather unintentional reference in response to a position stated by Rousseau.

At my leisure moments on several of the following days, I read with much expectation a celebrated book . . . Rousseau upon Education. But was I disappointed! Sure a more consummate coxcomb never saw the sun! How amazingly full of himself! Whatever he speaks, he pronounces as an oracle. But many of his oracles are as papably false, as that "young children never love old people." No! Do they never love grandfathers and grandmothers? Frequently more than they do their own parents. Indeed, they love all that love them and that with more warmth and sincerity than when they come to riper years.⁷

Wesley was not unaware of the mixed conditions which one would encounter during the advanced years. It may well be the responsibility of the society to care for the poor and the needy and the sick of any age, and the love of grandchildren may well warm the heart of the grandparent.

⁵Ibid., p. 192. ⁶Ibid., p. 398.

⁷Ibid., p. 309.

But age did come on sooner or later with the decrease in physical capabilities, even to those who would be in the Methodist societies, including the leader, himself. At the end of 1788, when he was in his eighty-fifth year, Wesley wrote:

About this time I was reflecting on the gentle steps whereby age steals upon us. Take only one instance. Four years ago my sight was as good as it was at five-and-twenty. I then began to observe that I did not see things quite so clearly with my left eye as with my right; all objects appeared a little browner to the eye. I began next to find some difficulty in reading a small print by candlelight. A year after, I found it in reading such a print by daylight. In winter, 1786, I could not well read our four-shilling hymnbook unless with a large candle; the next year I could not read letters if written with a small or bad hand. Last winter a pearl appeared on my left eye, the sight of which grew exceedingly dim. The right eye seems unaltered; only I am a great deal nearer-sighted than ever I was. Thus are "those that look out at the windows darkened" one of the marks of old age. But I bless God, "the grasshopper is not a burden." I am still capable of traveling, and my memory is much the same as ever it was; and so, I think, is my understanding.⁸

In this one will find little, if any, intention of giving in to the physical difficulties age might bring. If this was the position of the founder, it may be doubted that the Wesleyan Movement, in general, gave any special consideration to the needs of aging as such.

There was no particular need for the early societies to give consideration even to retired ministers or missionaries.

⁸Ibid., pp. 408-409.

Since there never was an intention to found a separate religious organization outside the Church of England, there was never more than an association of ministers agreeing to work together and societies in various locations throughout the British Isles seeking to further their own spiritual lives, to help in the proclaiming of the true Gospel of salvation and doing good works among those in dire need. No one was looking to the Wesleyans for any continuing obligated support in old age. Those who came with them in the preaching ministry were all lay preachers, most being with them only a matter of a few years, or doing their preaching while still gaining their financial support from other employment. Wesley's approach was that if a person was called to preach, he would preach as long as God gave strength. The term "retire" meant merely to go to bed for the night so that one could use the next day most effectively as God guided. As for the lay members of the societies, there is no evidence that Wesley thought the group or the government had any responsibility outside of that which was offered to the poor, the sick and the needy. The groups mentioned most frequently by Wesley in his writings were the prisoners and the children. The absence of specific reference to the aging would seem to indicate an attitude in which aging would be a natural part of the continuum of life. That the age of life expectancy was much lower in 1800 than in 1980 certainly would have an impact. There would be some in the midst of the Wesleyans who were in their 70s, or 80s

or even 90s, but they were not numerous enough to demand separate concern. The emphasis was on the preaching of the Gospel of salvation, and who would be more likely as subjects than the children and the prisoners? There were sufficient numbers in both of these categories in England in the eighteenth century to take the full energies of the societies.

Within the organized activities of the Wesleyan Movement were the establishing and maintaining a series of hostelries throughout England. These were houses where the needy and the ill could find help. There is no evidence that the work of the hostelries was directly related to the needs of the aged. However, understanding the needs of the aged in eighteenth century England, if the purpose of such houses was to help the poor and the ill, there would have been the aged included in the recipients.

It was out of such a heritage of concern and action that the current United Methodist Church has developed its ministry to the aging.

THE AMERICAN METHODIST RESPONSE

It must be noted that the Wesleyan Movement in America developed along lines that were not totally similar to the heritage in England. The influence of distance was certainly a factor. Even though John Wesley visited the colonies in the New World, and even though a lively correspondence was maintained between Wesley and the leaders in America,

and even though Wesley wrote numerous times giving his counsel on the American Revolution and church organization, the Wesleyans on this continent saw the work of the Church through different eyes than those of their founder. They did elect to be on the side of the revolutionists and sever governmental ties with the Mother Country. They did determine to form a new denomination and include some of the forms of the Church of England, most notably that of having Bishops. The new Church was seeing life in a perspective of a new world, not the confines of old England. An expanding society brought forth in a strange new adventure presented new situations which must be met with new attitudes and approaches. When the new country evidenced an expanding frontier, still additional challenges came. What might have been sufficient for John Wesley and his friends in England was not sufficient for Frances Asbury and his friends in America. Their heritage was cherished but the direction would be forever altered in their church life. There would be new responsibilities accepted by an organization which had a sense of its own uniqueness and calling.

One of the first evidences of the differences between the response of the American Methodists and the English Wesleyans to the needs of the aging in their midst was the acceptance of some responsibility to those who had been preachers in their churches. There was a definite shift from the use of lay preachers who served the Church as a sideline to the use of ordained men whose sole employment was the

ministry. Such full time ministers had no farm or business to fall back upon during their later years when they could no longer stand the rigors of the itinerancy. A man on the move, without time to engage in a business or farming, had little opportunity to accumulate property or money. There was a constant battle within the Church to keep men from preaching only a few years and then locating for financial reasons. Something had to be done concerning this situation of rapid turnover in leadership, but anyone with a family did not find it easy, or perhaps even possible, to stay in the ministry without the prospect of funding for the time when failing health would no longer permit one to earn one's living preaching. At the Christmas Conference in December, 1784, the itinerant preachers voted that an equalized income would be established whereby each one would receive an annual stipend of twenty-four pounds in Pennsylvania currency, approximately \$64.00 in Continental currency. This was presumably to cover the costs of their ministry.⁹ Sixteen years later at the General Conference of 1800 the annual allowance was raised from \$64.00 to \$80.00, but each minister had to keep an accurate accounting of all he received and spent and return to his Annual Conference anything over his allowance.¹⁰

The funding for such aid for ministers who were no

⁹Charles W. Ferguson, Organizing to Beat the Devil (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1971), p. 95.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 98.

longer active but in a position called "superannuated," was not easily found. A gallant beginning came at the Christmas Conference with all of the Methodist preachers gathered. Each one who was a signer of the Annual Conference records was asked to contribute two dollars each year at Conference time and when he became a traveling preacher he would pay 20 shilling in addition in the currency of Pennsylvania. The funds thus collected were to be used to help the "worn out" preachers or their dependents. However, this aid was not automatically given, but the minister or the dependent must apply because of need. This was the beginning of the Preacher's Fund of the Methodist Church in the United States.¹¹ The demands on this Fund would be proportionately little since most of the preachers were "worn out" or dead by the time they were 40 or so years old. It was reported that almost half the preachers who died before 1800 were under the age of 30 years, and up to 1844 approximately half died before they reached the age of 33. The records of the first 672 preachers in the Methodist ranks indicated that two-thirds died before they had preached more than 12 years.¹²

Regardless of the life expectancy of the preacher of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, there

¹¹Roger Burgess, "Funds for 'Worn Out Preachers,'" The Circuit Rider (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, April, 1978).

¹²Ferguson, p. 109.

was need for the Fund and for a more adequate way of underwriting it. This next step came about with the rise of the first business venture of the Methodists. Just five years after the Christmas Conference, the Methodist Book Concern was founded. Since the publishing business was to pay its way, and perhaps show some profit, it was determined that the yearly excess would be used, in part, to strengthen the Preacher's Fund. In the third year of its existence, 1792, the amount contributed totalled \$266.33.¹³ Greater stability and direction was given to this concern for the aging preachers when in 1798 the Methodist Conference reorganized the Preacher's Fund into the Chartered Fund, whose work it would be to care for "retired and worn preachers." Trustees were established for the Chartered Fund, and the profits from the book concern were to aid in this need. The Methodist Discipline of 1796 directs that such monies as are available from "the produce of the sale of our books, after the book debts are paid, and a sufficient capital is provided for carrying on the business" should go to the Chartered Fund.¹⁴

Beginning in 1833, a question was added to the agenda of the Conference sessions concerning the need of retired ministers. It inquired, "What amounts are necessary for superannuated preachers, and the widows and orphans of

¹³Burgess.

¹⁴The Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1796), pp. 73-76.

preachers; and to make up the deficiencies of those who have not obtained their regular allowances on the circuits?"¹⁵ As thoughtful and concerned as this question may have been, records would indicate the amount raised rarely, if ever, came near covering the need. The Pittsburg Conference, for example, reported in 1833 the need to be \$6,455.80. The amount reported raised for this purpose was only \$1,019.23. Again in 1844 this same Conference answered the question of need as being \$8,643.00 with only \$1,682.13 raised to meet it. There was no indication any action was instituted to remedy the deficits.¹⁶ Inadequate though they were, these were the first evidences of the Methodist Church in America becoming convinced that the Church needed to be aware and responsive to the needs of at least a segment of the aging in their midst.

The first step in the concerted work of the Methodist Church with both the lay and clergy aged persons came in 1850. After the hard winter of 1849-50, an appeal came to the Church in New York City specifically highlighting the plight of the needy aged in that place. A meeting was held at the home of Mrs. Eliza A. Farr to consider the appeal. Under the direction of Dr. Nathan Bangs, Presiding Elder, a committee of seven ladies was appointed to make contact with

¹⁵William Cannon, The History of American Methodism, Vol. I (Nashville: Abington Press, 1964), p. 599.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 600.

all of the pastors and stewards of the churches of the area to determine the needs of the aged people under their care. Following the report of this committee, and the holding of several other meetings, an organizational meeting was held in July, 1850, at Mulberry Street Methodist Episcopal Church at which time 69 managers were elected. When the managers, known as the Ladies' Union Aid Society, met on August 5 of that year, Mrs. Mary W. Mason was elected as the first directress. On November 19, 1850, the first home for the aged of the Methodist Episcopal Church (or any of the groups later to form the United Methodist Church) was opened at 16 Horatio Street, New York City. There were two qualifications required by the managers. The first was that of need of care. The second was that of being a member in good standing in the Methodist Episcopal Church for ten years, the last five of those having been in New York City.¹⁷ The work was continued at the Horatio Street location until 1857 when it was moved to larger and more desirable quarters at 42nd Street near 8th Avenue in New York City. This venture has become the Mother House of all homes for the aged of the Methodist Church throughout the United States.

Other homes for the aged soon followed. The second home of the Methodist Episcopal Church was founded in 1865 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Largely under the leadership of

¹⁷Matthew Simpson, ed., Cyclopaedia of Methodism (Philadelphia: Everets and Stewart, 1878), p. 452

Bishop Matthew Simpson and the Ladies' United Aid Society, the Philadelphia Conference determined to provide care for the aging in its area. Thus the Simpson House in Philadelphia was opened, later to become the Methodist Episcopal Home for the Aged. The expenses for this home were met by collections made by the ladies, with the addition of a series of fairs conducted by the ladies of various Methodist Episcopal Churches of the area. The first one was held in Concert Hall in 1867 with nearly \$23,000 in revenue. In all, the first four of these fairs totaled \$74,000 for the support of the Home. Jubilee concerts were also held by the Sunday Schools of Philadelphia, with the proceeds going to the Simpson House.¹⁸ By 1870 a larger building was opened for the residents, and the original building was then turned into a boarding house for those who were forced to live on a small income.

In 1867 the Home for the Aged of the Methodist Church of Baltimore City was opened, which became known as the N. M. Carroll Home for Aged Men and Women. This project was also under the leadership of women of the Church, with Miss Eliza Berry being the active force, working through the direction of the Washington Conference. Special attention was given to the aged Blacks as well as with the establishing of the Methodist Episcopal Home for the Aged, a Home for Colored People, which opened in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1870.

¹⁸Simpson, p. 453.

The Louisiana Conference also opened the LaFon Home for Aged Colored People in 1881 in New Orleans.

Several of the early homes for the aged established by the Methodist Episcopal Church were done through the European segments of the fellowship. The Bethany Home and Hospital was begun in 1890 in Chicago, Illinois, by the Central Northwest Swedish Conference, and was followed closely by the German Methodist Episcopalals who opened the Sunset Home in Quincy, Illinois, in 1892. The Methodist Protestant branch of the Church was also concerned for the housing of the needy elderly and established the Methodist Protestant Home for the Aged in Westminster, Maryland, in 1896. By the end of the century, these two branches of the Methodist Church were responsible for the opening of 17 homes for the aged spread from coast to coast. Of these, five were related to the Deaconess Societies of the denomination, two were for Blacks and two were ministering to European minorities in this country. They were sponsored by 11 conferences plus the cooperating churches of Camden County, New Jersey. The smallest of the homes had 20 residents, with the largest serving 147. These homes were:

- 1850 Methodist Episcopal Church Home for the Aged, New York, New York
- 1865 Methodist Episcopal Home for the Aged, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- 1867 Home for the Aged of the Methodist Church of Baltimore City, Baltimore, Maryland
- 1870 Methodist Episcopal Home for Aged Men and Women, A Home for Aged Colored People, Baltimore, Md.
- 1881 LaFon Old Folks' Home, New Orleans, Louisiana
- 1883 Brooklyn Methodist Episcopal Church Home, Brooklyn, New York

- 1890 Deaconess Old People's Home, Spokane, Washington
- 1890 Bethany Home for Aged, Chicago, Illinois (Swedish Conference)
- 1890 Home for the Aged and Infirm, Collingswood, New Jersey
- 1892 Old People's Home, Quincy, Illinois (German Conference)
- 1895 Agard Deaconess Rest Home, Lake Bluff, Illinois
- 1895 Centenary Home for the Aged, Charleston, South Carolina
- 1896 Methodist Protestant Home for the Aged, Westminster, Maryland
- 1898 Methodist Episcopal Old People's Home, Chicago, Illinois (Deaconess)
- 1898 Bancroft Rest Home, Ocean Grove, New Jersey (Deaconess)
- 1898 Methodist Home, Washington, D.C.
- 1899 Methodist Home for the Aged, Cincinnati, Ohio (Deaconess)¹⁹

There was an increasing call throughout the Church for the establishing of homes for the needy aged. The Church sought to respond to those who were not financially able to provide for their own needs. This response concluded that the surroundings provided should be pleasant, with adequate health care and something interesting to fill the time. The "Three-H Syndrome" of housing, health care, and hobbies, has been with us for a long time. Still, this response to the needs of the elderly is certainly a great step ahead of the general attitude toward the elderly at the turn of the century which was to ignore such persons of need.

THE EVANGELICAL ASSOCIATION RESPONSE

The ministry of the Evangelical Association to the elderly follows very closely the manner and intent of the

¹⁹This list was compiled by the author from numerous sources.

American Methodist Church. The manner and theology of this German Wesleyan group came almost entirely out of the early Methodist work in America. The founder, Jacob Albright, had united with a Methodist class following his conversion, feeling that the order and discipline of that group, together with their spiritual zeal and openness, reflected his own orderliness more than any other religious group of the day. He became an Exhorter in the Methodist Church and later felt a divine call to share that same ministry with others of German heritage and language in Pennsylvania. This action, taking him away from the class meetings for long periods of time, caused the separation of Albright from his chosen fellowship. At that time the Methodist did not intend to form a German work, Asbury being strongly opposed to it for many years to come. However, out of this early relationship the manner and belief of the Evangelical Association were formed.

Paralleling the development of the Methodists in its concern for its preachers, the Evangelical Association first gave attention to the needs of the elderly through its action on behalf of the needy ministers. In 1832 the Conference formed the Charitable Fund. The purpose of this Fund was to support "superannuated poor itinerants and the widows and orphans of deceased preachers."²⁰ There is no record of how this Fund was to be underwritten. A few years later the

²⁰Reuben Yeakle, History of the Evangelical Association, Vol. I (Cleveland: Mattill and Lamb, 1902), p. 211.

Fund was given more form and stability when the Charitable Society of the Evangelical Association was formed in 1835. It was indicated that at least some of the funding of this cause came about by the receiving of specified gifts since the Charitable Society was to take charge of all legacies bequeathed to the Society to "relieve poor superannuated itinerants, and after their death, their widows and orphans under 14 years of age."²¹ There was no intention of beginning what is known today as a pension for retired ministers as a whole. It was to be only a fund to help those who were destitute as they came to the end of their ministry. It is little wonder those who did live long enough to "retire" from the ministry, or who became superannuated, may well have been destitute, or their widows in want. It was reported that in 1805 the yearly salary was \$15.30 for Evangelical preachers. These monies were raised by collections wherever the men preached, and then the total collected for the year would be equally divided among the preachers. At first it did not allow any differences between the costs for married or single men, all receiving the same few dollars. It was observed very early that such sums were not enough "even to keep an itinerant in clothes during all seasons of the year."²² By 1810 the amount divided for the year had risen to \$30.00, but had fallen back to \$28.66 by 1821. It took twenty years for the Association to establish

²¹Ibid., p. 239.

²²Ibid., p. 110.

a level of remuneration recognizing different subsistence needs for single and married men. In 1841 the single preachers received \$60.00 for the year but the married men were given \$105.00, with an additional \$15.00 for each child under 14 years. Such a low level of income caused great consternation among some of the leaders of the denomination, for many ministers would come into the itinerancy for a time and then drop out in order to make a living for their families. One of the early historians of the Evangelical Association, William W. Orwig, wrote, "To resign the sacred office, because it is deficient in prospects for a proper provision in old age or for accumulating wealth for children or posterity, would be base and a denial of the faith once delivered to the saints."²³ There was indication from time to time that the Conference was less than happy with the inability of some of the preachers to be more effective in raising money for the preachers' fund, and it was suggested at least once that those who were deficient should not share as greatly as those who had been more successful in raising money. However, this suggestion did not prevail.

Even though some thought the preachers should live by more faith in the One who had called them into their ministry, the Evangelical Association did proceed with developing the Charitable Fund. Like the Methodists, the Evangelicals

²³Ibid., p. 156.

early related their first business venture to the support of the aged ministers. Following an early publishing enterprise which did not last, the second publishing work was started in 1837. From its very inception a part of the profits was earmarked for the support of poor and superannuated preachers and their widows and orphans.²⁴ It was reported that this source of revenue produced nearly a quarter of a million dollars in the fifty years between 1837 and 1887 for the support of the ministers in need in their old age.

There soon came the response within the Evangelical Association to the felt need for the providing of special homes for elderly who were not able to provide for themselves. The first such home was the Evangelical Home for the Aged in Philadelphia, founded in 1888. This project was under the sponsorship of the East Pennsylvania Conference. Other Conferences followed with homes for the aged with the Altenheim at Ebenezer, New York, begun in 1897, later to be known as the Ebenezer Old People's Home, and the concern within other areas bringing homes into being early in the following century. The pattern of these homes was identical to that previously noted under the supervision of the Methodist Church. The concept was to offer shelter in Christian compassion for those who were not able to care for themselves in their old age, usually because of financial or health

²⁴Ibid., p. 433.

reasons. As with the Methodists, the homes of the Evangelicals mainly served people of their own communion, but were open to those of any church background. Since the spirit of ecumenism and acceptance of others' religious positions was not as prevalent then as in later years, it proved rather awkward for those to be comfortable in these homes who had strong backgrounds of faith rather different from some of the rigid positions of the Wesleyans in the matters of social practices. Thus, even though there were no specific restrictions for entrance into the homes relating to church membership, the manner of solicitation of residents and the expectation of the conduct of those in the homes, kept the constituency rather homogeneous.

THE RESPONSE OF THE UNITED BRETHREN IN CHRIST

In the history of the United Brethren in Christ, the response to the needs of the aged followed rather closely those of the Methodists and the Evangelicals. Here, too, the major emphasis of the Church was on the proclamation of salvation, even though the records of all three groups refer to the social issues of that day, and resolutions petitioned governmental authorities for action in keeping with the positions of the denominational bodies. This total approach to life also placed concern for the aged in a life continuum view rather than seeing it a separate segment to receive special ministry. The United Brethren were definitely a part of this concept and action.

The earliest noted concern for those who may be aged was, like the other two denominations, a reference to the needs of the ministers in the fellowship. Salaries were very low. As of 1807 all married preachers were receiving 40 pounds (\$106.80) for the year, and single preachers were given 24 pounds (\$64.08).²⁵ By 1811 this amount was raised to \$80.00 for single men who "traveled regularly."²⁶ The married men, in 1812, were to receive \$160.00 and an additional amount for expenses was indicated. However, the ministers were instructed to keep exact account of the money received.²⁷ This amount was maintained at least through 1825, when it was determined that the married or single bishops were to receive this same salary as all the other preachers in their category, but no more.²⁸

It was at the Conference of 1812 that the first reference is made to any preachers dying during the year. Four were so recorded: Peter Kemp, John Hershey, Matthias Kessler and Martin Boehm (one of the founders of the denomination). The following year reference was made to the death of George Adam Geeting, another of the early pioneers of the United Brethren fellowship. The account of Geeting's

²⁵Minutes of Annual and General Conference of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, 1800-1818 (Dayton, Ohio: United Brethren Publishing House, 1897), p. 20.

²⁶Ibid., p. 26. ²⁷Ibid., p. 28.

²⁸Proceedings of General Conferences, Church of the United Brethren in Christ, 1815-1873 (Dayton, Ohio: Historical Society of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, 1962), p. 21.

death read:

His age was seventy-one years, four months, and twenty-two days. He spent nearly forty years in the office of an evangelical preacher, which he filled with great faithfulness. . . . He closed his course when on a journey from Baltimore to his home, on Sunday forenoon between eleven and twelve o'clock, after he had sung, along with those standing about him. . . . He breathed his last and his triumphant spirit as conqueror ascended to the victor's crown. Amen.²⁹

It seemed evident that the only honorable way to leave the ministry was by death, not by age retirement. In the following year, 1814, William Otterbein, another of the founders of the fellowship, was listed among those who had died. Of this great leader of the faith it was said, "His trust in God and his love for undying souls were boundless. He died, at last, in the peace of the Lord, November 17, 1813. His age was eighty-seven years, five months, and thirteen days."³⁰

There was no intention of giving support to older preachers who could still fulfill their functions in the Church. Only the "worn out" preachers raised some concern at this time. In seeking to meet these needs, the United Brethren followed the same concept of the Methodists and the Evangelicals in designating the profits from their publishing interests to be used to aid "the travelling and worn out preachers and their widows and orphans" in their action of

²⁹Minutes, United Brethren Church, 1800-1818, p. 32.

³⁰Ibid., p. 35.

1837.³¹ However, in this case the Printing Establishment proved to be unable to provide financial aid, since it very early ran into a severe debt condition. Over the years the problems of the debt on the publishing interests kept being raised in each General Conference, until in the Bishop's Address in 1873 it was stated that this indebtedness was finally under control. This was not to imply the debt was paid, but that it was not worsening.³²

Seeking to aid in the situation of the elderly ministers unable to continue in active service, the General Conference of 1861 moved to establish a "General Benevolent Fund," since there had been no funds coming from the Printing Establishment as anticipated. This fund was to be raised through the Annual Conferences as each of them may individually direct.³³ This action was considerably later than either the Methodist Episcopal's or the Evangelical's in organizing a fund for such relief, and doubtless reflected the effect the publishing house debt had on the entire proceedings of the denomination during those years. This act was also at variance with the other two approaches in that it left the major part of the plan up to the several Annual Conferences, rather than centering it in the General Conference structure of the Church. Later records indicate the weakness of this facet of the work of the United Brethren in Christ in

³¹Proceedings, United Brethren Church, 1815-1873, p. 72.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 438.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 296.

comparison to the advances of the sister denominations.

The first actual response on the part of the total Church to ministerial need came in 1864 when Bishop J. Markwood became acutely in need of help because of disability caused by paralysis on one side of his body. Since the disability had come to one who had given his life in such total devotion to the ministry, it was deemed only proper that the Church should respond to the need, although no provisions had previously been made for such contingencies. It was voted that the Bishop's home conference, Virginia, should seek to raise \$500 within its churches, and the rest of the denomination would also seek to raise a matching \$500. Later the sum agreed upon from the various Annual Conferences was increased to \$685.³⁴ It would be some years later when the question of a retired bishop receiving remuneration would actually be debated. In 1897 it was determined the salary for Bishops Emeriti would be established, and this was set at \$1500, in comparison to the salary of an active Bishop, which was set at \$1800. However, when Bishops Castle and Kephart retired in 1905, their actual salary for retirement was set at one-half that of the active Bishops.

Such provisions for "worn out" Bishops did not encourage other active Bishops to retire because of age. In 1873, Bishop Glossbrenner summed up his attitude toward the ministry by saying,

³⁴Ibid., p. 213.

As old as I am, after forty-two years in the itinerancy of this church, without the loss of a year, if I am not sufficiently strong in some respects, I feel I am sufficiently strong in my heart to go forward and do whatever this church requires of me to do. It may have been expected by some that I would resign. I don't resign! "Live or die, sink or swim, survive or perish," I go to my district to do the best I can. . . . This church has had my youthful days, it has had my ripe years, and God willing, it shall have the years of my old age. Whether I live long or die soon, I hope to die at my post.³⁵

By the end of the nineteenth century the Church of the United Brethren in Christ had not begun work through homes for the aged. However, the concern was beginning to be evident to the point of bringing a resolution to the General Conference of 1897, presented by the Board of Bishops, calling for the appointment of a Committee on Old People's Home, Orphan's Home, and Deaconesses. In support of this action, Bishop Mills said,

I have thought we should have a home for worn-out itinerants and their widows and orphans, and if that is what he means by old people's homes, I am most thoroughly in sympathy with it. . . . I think they have already made some arrangements in one of the Eastern Conferences, and a home has already been established there, and I heard someone speak of such a home in the West.³⁶

Records fail to indicate what homes Bishop Mills alluded to in these remarks. There was some discussion as to whether these homes should be restricted only for the use of the

³⁵Proceedings of The General Conference of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ (Dayton, Ohio: United Brethren Publishing House, 1873), p. 208.

³⁶Proceedings of the General Conference of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ (Dayton, Ohio: United Brethren Publishing House, 1897), p. 565.

ministers and their widows and orphans, and a plea was made to open them for laity as well.

The United Brethren Church may have been a little slower than the Methodists and Evangelicals in responding to the developing needs of aged persons in their midst, but the pattern was emerging in a very similar vein to that of the other two denominations. In only a few years the first home for the aged would begin as a part of the total denominational work.

A COMMENDABLE CONCERN

Much could be said from the vantage point of today concerning the philosophies and programs carried out by the Methodists, the Evangelicals, and the United Brethren during the early development of care for the aged. However, every act needs to be seen from the setting of its own day. Little, if anything, was being done for the elderly by any other agency in America at the turn of the century and throughout the 1800s. It was the sensitivity and conscience of the Church which declared the increasing need for help to these in their midst and in the society at large. It was the Christian response and alternative to the "poor house" which was all the community offered to the needy, including the elderly needy of that day. It is true that old age was seen as the time to await death. When J. M. Saylor retired after 41 years in active service, the conclusion of a resolution honoring his years of faithful service read,

". . . and trust that the evenings of a well spent life may be pleasant and full of joy in waiting for the coming of his Master."³⁷ This may have been the highest accolade of that day, but with such a concept of old age, what better provision could the Church seek to make for those of advanced years than pleasant surroundings while awaiting a blessed transferral to eternal life? The work was commendable and it proved a firm step upon which all the later ministry to the aged has been built, the basis of Christian concern and love.

This appreciation for the work begun by the early pioneers of the faith has been expressed by later leaders in this manner:

During the long period of the years, when there was little done for these aged people, the Church has carried forward its program in a very generous manner and provided homes and care, and expended large sums of money to provide for the very needy cases. A large part of the service rendered has been gratuitous. The Church has been mindful of the teachings of Jesus in providing loving care to the aged and infirm.³⁸

³⁷S. C. Breyfogel, Landmarks of the Evangelical Association (Reading, Pa.: Eagle Book Print, 1888), p. 327.

³⁸The Board of Hospitals and Homes, The Methodist Episcopal Church, Golden Jubilee Celebration Report (New York: Author, 1934), p. 7.

Chapter Three

THE CHALLENGE OF TODAY'S CHANGES

Throughout the years since the Wesleyan work first started in America, sweeping changes have taken place in the relationship of the aged to the general population. The number of those over 65 years of age has dramatically increased, as compared with a hundred years ago. As life expectancy continues to extend more and more beyond the age of sixty or even seventy, new needs confront our society. Many more recent theories concerning aging and the older people are being presented with the references to more and more studies which would seek to validate such theories. Many persons experience increasing difficulty in adjusting to growing older under concepts that no longer fit the prior concept of old age as primarily a time of waiting for death. This may be true even though in the Christian view that death might be a joyful expectancy of presence with God.

The Church will do well to address itself to the spiritual ramifications of these, and other changes which have been developing in our society relative to those in the upper years of life. Such challenges need to be addressed concerning their validity in reference to the Christian theology of life and the ministry of the Gospel. The Church is being called upon to constantly redefine its role as it

relates to societal attitudes in the field of gerontology and the concomitant roles of other governmental and societal agencies in the fulfillment of the needs of the elderly. This bold facing of the role of the Church in all of its changes and advancements will need to be applied directly to the work the Church is doing in this day if that work is to be effective. There will also need to be a futuristic thrust by the Church into the concepts and planning for itself and for the society for the days to come.

RADICAL CHANGE IN NUMBERS

The most apparent change which has come in our society since the early 1800s, and the beginning of the concern of the Church for the aging, is the unusually large increase in the numbers of people in the upper age groupings. The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare reports that for the population of the United States over the age of 60, there were approximately 4,900,000 such persons in 1900. By 1977 this number had risen to 32,800,000, with approximately one-fourth being 75 years of age or older. With present projections it is estimated that by the year 2000 this segment of our population will total about 42,000,000, and by 2035 there will be 71,000,000 over the age of 60, one-third of these being over 75 and one-tenth being over 85 years of age.¹ In 1900 only 4 percent of our population

¹U.S., Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Older Americans (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1978).

was 65 years of age or over. At present this age group comprises more than 10 percent of our population. This percentage will continue to rise, given current demographic information. No event, save an unforeseeable calamity affecting the aged particularly can drastically alter the numbers, and only a very sharp increase in the birth rate would alter the projected percentages.

Even though much has been reported on the possibility of expanding the life span, there is very little evidence that such has happened. As we have noted previously, there have always been the elderly in man's society. We have observed that Moses is reported to have lived at least 120 years. Scientists still tend to believe that such an age is about the limit of life span for the human race.² The major change is in the greater number living toward that life span. In 1900, life expectancy was only 47 years for the United States. In 1973 that figure had increased to 71 years.³ It is fully expected that this figure will increase in the years to come, adding to current concerns about the problems of aging relative to the needs often brought on by the length of life after retirement.

This radical change in sheer numbers of aged in our population necessitates our redefining "old." For example,

²Diana S. Woodruff, Can You Live to be 100? (New York: Chatham Square Press, 1977).

³U.S., Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Report (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1975).

my paternal grandfather was semi-retired from the farm in his late 50s and was considered an "old" man when in his 60s. My own father retired from the ministry in his mid-60s and became an "old" man in his 70s. With present concepts of retirement currently on the horizon, I do not know for sure when I will retire, and perhaps I will not be seen as an "old" man until I am in my 80s! As the Church is working with the "elderly" it must have some definitive understandings and definitions of this part of its ministry, definitions which are in the rapid process of adjustment.

Such a definition of "old" would include the element of retirement age, whether this remains purely chronological or shifts to more of an assessment of adequacy for the job. There is the element of behavioral changes among those in advanced age which may or may not have any direct bearing on senility with its obvious physiological changes. The definition of "old" also includes the time when social roles are adjusted into those which society accepts as belonging to the "aged." Finally, there is the element of self-report in which a person admits to being "old." All of these factors of the definition which is adopted by the Church are not simple to keep accurate, not as simple as either the Church or society in general has assumed in the past.

The great body of misconception concerning the elderly complicates the establishing of a working definition. It becomes rather obvious with even a surface review of the segment of our society over the age of 65 that a great variation

exists within this group of thirty-three million people. Still the stereotypes persist that to be old is to be sick, useless, senile, rigid, conservative, apathetic and pre-occupied with approaching death. James D. Manney has expressed it in this way:

The American attitudes towards older people emerge forcefully in our language. We scorn them ("old coot" "old fool"), find them rigid and useless ("you can't teach an old dog new tricks"); think they are silly ("old biddy"); and in a revealing phrase, perceive in them a sexual threat ("dirty old man"). At the same time, language also reveals the euphemistic attitudes which cover the underlying hostility ("golden years" "senior citizens"). Other myths and stereotypes abound. We believe that old people are serene; that their children usually abandon them; that older people's behavior can be attributed to senility as the brain degenerates. None of these stereotypes is accurate, yet this childlike portrait influences the way the young behave toward the old. We humor old people, visit them dutifully, care for them if necessary, and keep them out of sight.⁴

Such a concept of the aged would apply to an extremely small segment of the elderly, however the definition is written. For instance, only 5 percent of the population of the United States 65 years of age or over is in any kind of an institutional setting, including hospitals and nursing homes. At least 95 percent of these elderly are living in some kind of independent situation. No one meeting a Gray Panther thinks of someone who is apathetic and useless.

The definition, in order to afford effective ministry, requires other bases than these just presented. All of

⁴James D. Manney, Jr., Aging in American Society (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Institute of Gerontology, University of Michigan, Wayne State University, 1975).

those persons over the age of 65 or 70 or 75 cannot be placed in a predictable pattern. Broad assumptions will lead to erroneous responses, and will need to be avoided. Limitations based on such assumptions are not valid. The definition of "old" will need to take on a more fluid form if the Church will truly be in ministry to the aging.

CHANGES IN NEEDS AMONG THE ELDERLY

Not only has there been a drastic change in the numbers of the elderly within our society, but with the change in life expectancy and many of the patterns of our society, there have come some radical changes in the needs of the elderly as compared with a century ago. The very fact that a person reaching the age of 60 can expect to live another fifteen or twenty years more brings new considerations which were not operative when they could expect only a few more years before death. The very expectation that most of these additional years would include relatively good health would also be important. These changes have given rise to the concept of the division of the elderly into three categories: the young old, the old, and the old old. Each subgroup faces a more specific set of needs and responses not common to all who are over 65 years of age. This newer view is not dissimilar to our pattern of viewing adolescence as early-, middle-, and later-. Relationships to activity, health problems and self report would seem to be more valid if this division was made in the approach to the ministry to the aging.

One aspect of the change in life expectancy and the change in health patterns is the lengthening years of time freed from structured work schedules for those who have retired. It was noted that in the early days of the concern of the Church for the elderly, there was no such concept as universal retirement nor retirement at any agreed upon specific age. A person retired when no longer able to do the work or when sufficiently wealthy to live comfortably without income from regular work. Thus, in 1900, 65 percent of American men over 65 years of age were still active in the labor market. In 1950 this percentage had been reduced to only 50 percent, and in 1960 to about 33 percent. Today only 20 percent of the men over 65 are still in the labor market. Many of these are in the ownership or professional areas.⁵ For 80 percent of the men and 85 percent of the women over 65 their time is freed from the necessary demands of the work schedule required by gainful employment. This is usually the first time of life that days and years are without school or work references, especially for the men. Many women complain that they do not get to "retire" from housework, which has been their primary occupation. Yet this traditional role-assignment may contribute to their staying active and outliving men. This change in the demand of schedules with retirement may well encompass almost a third of what will be the person's total life. This new

⁵U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Census Bureau Study, 1976.

freedom is found to be a mixed blessing.

Another important element of the newer needs of the older population is that surrounding widowhood and the life of the single older woman. Women outlive men, the life expectancy usually exceeding that of men by seven years.⁶ Latest figures indicate that approximately 79 percent of the men 65 years of age and older are married and living with their wives, while only 38 percent of the women in this age group are married and living with their husbands.⁷ This means that almost two-thirds of the women in this category are alone, either widows or never married. This is three times the number of men in a similar circumstance of aloneness. Masters and Johnson state from their studies, "Many members of this (single elderly women) group demonstrate their basic insecurity by casting themselves unreservedly into their religion, the business world, volunteer social work, or overzealous mothering of their maturing children or grandchildren."⁸ This aloneness for single older women becomes an additional concern to be placed high on any priority of ministry within the Church.

Most evident is the need of adequate financial

⁶Irene M. Burnside, "Sexuality and Aging," in Aging: An Overview, eds: Bea Steffl and Joseph B. Mann (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona State University, 1976), p. 83.

⁷U.S. Census Study, 1976.

⁸William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson, "Human Sexual Response: The Aging Female and the Aging Male," in Middle Age and Aging, ed: Bernice L. Neugarten (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 272.

provisions for the greatly extended years of life and extended opportunities for active living. Many who are now over 65 sought to provide for their old age when a retirement home could be purchased for less than 20 percent of the cost at the time they leave the work force, and life expectancy was less than 10 years after gainful employment ended. Pension plans and insurance policies were related to this concept. Such plans are no match for life as they find it today. Thus the urgent cry of the numbers of the elderly now living in poverty.

Much of the financial pressure comes from changing expectations as to a life style so different from these which prevailed during their working years. Rocking chairs do not cost as much as boats and travel trailers, but they are not as exciting, either. Not for the young-old, at least. Still, this longer active life span and the change in life style among those over 65 has greatly intensified financial need.

In the understanding of the ministry for the future, it would be well to recognize the differing concepts of the elderly for the years to come. For the elderly of tomorrow are those in the midst of their working life today. When their years of retirement or agedness come, their background for the experience will not be the same as the aged of today. Neugarten and Moore, respected sociologists in the field of gerontology, have expressed the future in this way:

The next generation of pensioners will be different from the present one in so far as they will be

less differentiated from other age groups in respect to income, education, and ethnicity. Whether or not they will become more segregated, by assignation, cannot be determined. At the same time, higher incomes, better health, and more years of retirement may well stimulate the further development of a subculture of leisure for the aged . . . a development which may, by making old age a less unattractive period of life, raise the prestige of this age group.⁹

The assumption that each grouping of the aging will be just like the one before it gives rise to unworkable and useless misconceptions, which too often determine the working policies of current ministry. The progression of change among the aging will be just as determinative in planning for tomorrow's ministry as today's elderly differ from those of a century ago. The major difference will be the rapidity with which the changes occur.

CURRENT THEORIES ON AGING

Much of the approach to the ministry to the aging will depend not only on the theology established but also on an understanding of many of the sociological theories concerning aging which are being proposed today. Only recently have the various branches of scholarship seriously begun to address the reality of an aging population. As would be expected, many of the theories are complementary to each other and some are in opposition to others. The Church would do well to know what the sociologists are thinking,

⁹Bernice Neugarten and Joan Moore, "The Changing Age-Status System," in Middle Age and Aging, ed: Bernice L. Neugarten (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 21.

for it is on these theories that much of the approach to the aging population is being based in our present society, and perhaps for the near future.

Some of the better known theories concerning aging in relation to life-style and response include those known as Activity, Disengagement, Role, Role Transition, Personality Continuity and Subculture. Not all of these are mutually exclusive, but at times one or another of them presents a facet of the aging experience otherwise completely ignored. Of all of the various theories propounded, the ones of Activity, Disengagement, and Personality Continuity are the major ones.

Havighurst and Albrecht, in 1953, proposed the Activity Theory of aging. Their contention was that the roles a person fills during his middle years are basically the roles he tries to maintain throughout his later years. The roles from which a person disengages are only those from which society or illness force the disengagement; it does not occur out of a desire to voluntarily withdraw. New roles must be found to replace those lost, or remaining roles must be strengthened to compensate for the lessening of roles. Thus the days of aging become a continuing struggle to remain as in the days of middle years. The theory stated that a positive relationship is found between activity and life satisfaction, and the greater the loss of role the lower the life satisfaction.¹⁰ If a person can retain during his

¹⁰Bruce Lemon, Vern Bengtson, James Peterson, "An Exploration of the Activity Theory," in Aging in America,

later years as much of the activity begun in the roles assumed during the middle years, according to this theory, that person will experience successful aging.

An opposing view of aging was proposed by Cummings and Henry in 1961, described as the Disengagement Theory of Aging. It was their position that both the older person and society mutually accepted a withdrawing of the aged person from social interaction, and that such withdrawal was desirable for all concerned. On the part of the aged person this withdrawal was accompanied by an increased preoccupation with the self and a decreased involvement, emotionally and actively, with persons or events in society. This disengagement is a natural process rather than being a process imposed only by society.¹¹ This disengagement begins sometimes in middle life when certain changes of concepts begin relative to the future of one's life and the inevitability of death. Such an action frees the old to die without disrupting the vital affairs of society, and allows the older person to enjoy life without the sense of responsibility of earlier roles.

Later studies have indicated that neither the Activity Theory nor the Disengagement Theory really explained successful aging. Neugarten and Atchley thus proposed the

eds: Cary S. Kart and Barbara B. Manard (Port Washington, N.Y.: Alfred Publishing Co., 1976), p. 61.

¹¹Elaine Cummings, "Further Thoughts on the Theory of Disengagement," in Aging in America, eds: Cary S. Kart and Barbara B. Manard (Port Washington, N.Y.: Alfred Publishing Co., 1976), p. 19ff.

Personality Continuity Theory of aging. This theory viewed life in its total development. A person ages in the same manner that he has lived all of his years, for there is a predisposition in each person to maintain those basic factors of his personality throughout life. Thus, lost roles do not need to be replaced if they do not disrupt the basic nature of personality. Those things that have brought rewards to life are kept, and that which has given least rewards can easily be let go. A level of disengagement occurs as these lesser roles are dropped. From this view the experience of aging proceeds according to the type of personality of each individual. It is, therefore, not possible to pattern successful aging for an entire group of different individuals. As Havighurst came to understand,

The relationship between levels of activity and life satisfaction are influenced also by personality type, particularly by the extent to which the individual remains able to integrate emotional and rational elements of the personality.¹²

Among those seeking to define the experience of the aging is Erik Erikson who developed the eight stages of ego development throughout a person's lifetime. The last, or eighth stage he calls Late Adulthood. While he does not give age indications for each of his stages, it would be valid to identify the eighth stage as that which we would call aged. The basic contention during this time of life

¹²Robert Havighurst, "Personality and Patterns of Aging," in Aging in America, eds: Cary S. Kart and Barbara B. Manard (Port Washington, N.Y.: Alfred Publishing Co., 1976), p. 199.

is ego integrity versus despair. Ego integrity is the assurance of the dignity and order of one's life after a lifetime of various experiences of worth. The despair comes when the person senses that life has not been fulfilled, and death is approaching to destroy that life. Life is now too short to start over and there is no opportunity to build another life of integrity. Ego integrity sees death as a valid completion of a life fully lived. Erikson says, "The relation of adult integrity and infantile trust: healthy children will not fear life if their elders have integrity enough not to fear death."¹³

It is through a study of such leaders in the field of aging in our own day that the Church will be able to come to a more adequate understanding of the aging phenomenon and to review the ministry it has had to the aging, the ministry it is currently offering, and the ministry it will be planning for the near future.

INCREASING COMPLAINTS ABOUT AGING

There is an increasing amount of reference in the literature, and an even greater increase in the popular magazines and newspapers, concerning the difficulty of aging today. Most of it is piecemeal, making reference to problems of health, housing, leisure time, finances, loss of status, loneliness, and other similar subjects. There is sufficient

¹³Erik Erikson, "Generativity and Ego Integrity," in Middle Age and Aging, ed: Bernice L. Neugarten (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 87.

validity to such pleas to indicate they cannot be denied in any consideration of the concern of the Church with the aging. However, a holistic approach is called for if such difficulties are to be alleviated to any degree.

It is becoming more evident that a part of the difficulty many are facing in the aging experience has been brought about by the lack of expectation and preparation for living in the older years. If it is assumed that a person knows how to live the last third of life as a continuum of the previous two-thirds, yet without the continuing involvement of work and family responsibilities, the assumption generally would be false. Our society, as is the case with most every society, does much to socialize its young and its young adults in knowing how to accept and fulfill their expected roles. It has only been of recent years that the role of the elderly in our society has been much more than being a congenial, sometimes wise, elder while awaiting death. With the crumbling of that role, there have not been alternative valid roles developed and accepted generally throughout society to the extent that a great many of the elderly can anticipate and prepare for such a life. How should the elderly live? How should they dress? What kind of leadership should they share in the community? How much money should this life style require? These, and many other questions of relationships are still being debated by old and young alike, with a multitude of studies being devised by the gerontologists, with no definitive answers forthcoming

as yet.

There is the struggle for the elderly in living many years after the roles which have brought them respect in earlier life have been lost. Society soon forgets who the leaders of industry or of government were once they are gone from active participation. The loss of recognition is even more pronounced for persons who have held lesser roles. Forced retirement and even rapidly changing technology eliminates the respect of the work role. Living for years in the same neighborhood no longer brings prestige in our mobile society. The knowledge explosion does not enhance the role of the wisdom of age, except if someone wants to know about the "good old days" for pure nostalgia. Family patterns are changing with mobility, so that the parents in their later years often live at great distances from the young generations of their families, knowing little of the day to day experiences and seldom asked to give counsel and guidance. The forced increase of time together after retirement has not always brought a deeper enjoyment and sharing between husband and wife. In many instances the traditional role as head of the house is lost by the husband, since he is no longer the breadwinner; now he must learn to be an equal partner, at best.

Another of the difficulties in successful aging is the importance our society places upon the young and the segment of our society seen as being productive. Sharon Curtin, writing under the title "Aging in the Land of the Young,"

contends for this thesis.¹⁴ Her studies indicate that with the worship of youth and with cultural attitudes bigoted against old people, people are afraid to grow old. The aged become an insult and a threat to society. This attitude, Curtin believes, is not engendered by the young, but by those of middle years who are afraid to lose their positions in society, and thus to grow old. In such a society there is no place for the elderly, no role to be fulfilled. Such a society seeks to make its elders invisible. Such an attitude involves the aged in a painful struggle to maintain a sense of worth.

It has already been noted that a person carries into old age the basic life style he has developed during his active years. But the rapidly changing society may not have a place for the life style of several decades ago. The swinging grandpa at the disco is ludicrous, but so is the grandma who cannot understand anything that is happening to her grandchildren. Adjusting a life style of years ago into the society in which an elder is living today brings stress which not all are able to handle effectively.

Much of the difficulty and hurt being experienced by the elderly in our society is caught up in the title of a book by Lamb and Duffy, The Retirement Threat.¹⁵ The authors

¹⁴ Sharon Curtin, "Aging in the Land of the Young," Atlantic Monthly, July, 1972.

¹⁵ Tony Lamb and Dave Duffy, The Retirement Threat (J. P. Archer, Inc., 1978), throughout.

believe that retirement is no longer a time which brings freedom and comfort for most elderly, and that the society needs to act boldly to make retirement years what they ought to be. However, a consideration of the experience of the aged through history raises the question whether old age was ever a time of comfort and freedom. It would be more accurate to picture the days of age as not fulfilling the hopes and dreams those of advanced years would like to experience today. A part of Sharon Curtin's position on the fear of many in middle age to grow old is that they cannot always take the life style they are accustomed to into old age because of lack of money, diminished health, and lack of position. This concern of a change of life style often required by age and retirement has brought on the flood of articles and books emphasizing the need for pre-retirement planning, beginning in the 40s and becoming workable by age 60. Writing in the Arizona Republic, Karen Boyd says, "If you wait until 65 to plan your retirement, you may be 10 years too late."¹⁶ Because of the rapidly changing society of which we are a part, the longer life, the financial insecurity and the confusion of accepted roles for the aged, it does indicate a new means of socialization for aging must be developed if the older years will be meaningful either to the elderly or to society in general.

¹⁶ Karen Boyd, "Retirement Means New Identity," The Arizona Republic, August 10, 1978.

SPIRITUAL IMPLICATIONS

Out of all these considerations regarding the aging, a haunting question persists: "What really makes life at any age valuable?" There may even be some values more unique to the latter years of life which are not now recognized. The medical profession is seeking to add more years to our lives. Consider, in the light of the lengthening of our years, the plight evidenced by the Psalmist generations ago: "Seventy years is all we have . . . eighty years, if we are strong; yet all they bring us is trouble and sorrow; life is soon over and we are gone."¹⁷ If more years for the greater number in our society would only multiply the agony of the Psalmist for today, then it would be a question whether more years is an experience to be sought. If retirement is a threat and added years a burden, then the meaning of life is disjointed in the Christian hope.

The all important question is "What adds meaning to life?" In our given situation, the slogan "Adding Life to Years" is not invalid. The time to discover that which brings lasting meaning to life and that which can be adjusted throughout the changes of life is the time before one reaches the age of retirement. If work roles and the satisfactions they bring do not persist in age, and if the parenting roles and their fulfillment do not continue, a person must look to other sources of meaning for the last

¹⁷Psalm 90:10 (TEV).

third of life. Otherwise the high suicide rate among the elderly, and the increasing incidence of alcoholism of the aged will continue to mount, especially among the more affluent males.¹⁸ For retirees who want to become involved in meaningful events in their communities, what constitutes these "meaningful events"?

This search for meaning in life, especially in the later years, has been a part of the rise in the subject of death and dying. Articles and books in this field which once would have been relegated to medical or theological circles are now being written with the general public in mind. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross and others are assuring questioners that the life we are now living is not all there is, and life does continue after physical death. Those not willing to accept this premise long proposed by the religions of the world may often be seeking to have their faith bolstered by what they would accept as scientific proof. The avid interest ought not to be ignored.

The current interest in life after death is not the same as the earlier assumption that old age is the time to wait for death to come. The slogan "Waiting to Die: A Waste of Life" affirms the value of life each day, regardless of chronological age. Today's longer span of life gives opportunity to the elderly to engage in activities of meaning and value denied to earlier generations. The "3-H

¹⁸Douglas C. Kimmel, Adulthood and Aging (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1974), p. 327.

Syndrome" of health, housing and hobbies is not sufficient to fulfill the years which have been added to life. There still must be answered the question, "Why am I given more years to live and what will I do with these added years to give them meaning?"

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CHURCH

Important segments of society are undertaking to improve the condition of the aging. Medical science attempts to diminish pain and disability. Sociology and psychology attempt to describe what happens in aging and why, in order to aid persons of advanced years. Various other disciplines have begun to relate their work to the field of gerontology. There are strong indications that contemporary religion has become a significant partner in this conversation.

There are many directions the Church can explore and in which it can experiment in seeking to define its ministry to the aging. If the theological premise is accepted which was proclaimed by Christ, "I have come that men may have life, and may have it in all its fullness,"¹⁹ the Church will determine its ministry accordingly. The implication of this position would be the ministry of the Church to all peoples regardless of religious affiliation, or lack of it. A passage from the Petrine tradition expresses another dimension of ministry, "Tend that flock of God whose shepherds you are, and do it, not under compulsion, but of your own

¹⁹John 10:10b (NEB).

free will, as God would have it."²⁰ These later words call for a ministry that relates more specifically to the religious community. Both modes of ministry are valid if the Church is to cover the scope of the need.

Within the community of faith a significant aspect of the shepherding task is to help the elderly cope with the peculiar opportunities and demands of advancing years. Meaning and strength are best found in the intimate sharing of a caring community. This leads the Church to the creation of ministries which may well include the entire age span of the Christian community, offering to the elderly understanding, acceptance, love and sharing in the total context of the faith. The ministry will be specific as practical needs are addressed. The meaning of the later years of life will be seen as an integral part of the Christian community.

The second aspect of the Church's concern for the aging has to do with those outside its own walls. Christ came to minister love and life to all mankind. To fulfill this aspect of its ministry, the Church centers more on being an advocate for the aged, the conscience of the society. It confronts and attempts to change common attitudes of society in general concerning the elderly, acting from the Christian conviction of the value of all life in the sight of God. It also seeks to enlarge the common understanding that the meeting of the needs of the elderly is primarily a matter of

²⁰I Peter 5:2 (NEB)

health, housing and leisure. It shares its vision of the value and purpose of life, and the fulfillment of that life in helping and sharing activities. It challenges government concerning the accepted values as well as all other segments of society. The manner in which the income of the government is divided between defense and humanitarian needs is brought to attention. The question of the availability of medical care, and similar services is raised. At every point in which the elderly are seen as failing to be an equal part of our society the Church becomes the advocate in the spirit of Christ, the Great Shepherd.

Thus, the responsibility of the Church is two-pronged. It has a ministry of meaning and sharing to the elderly within its own community. It has a ministry, as well, to the elderly in the total community as their advocates of life as God has intended throughout their total years.

Chapter Four

FROM HOLDING PATTERN TO VITAL LIVING:

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Through the years following 1900, the United Methodist Church and its predecessor denominations have experienced radical changes in concept and program concerning the aging persons both in the fellowship of the Church and within the general society. This can best be described as a shift from a concept of ministering to the aged who were in urgent needs as they awaited death, to a ministry to the aging who are vitally alive and in need of an adjusted relationship to all phases of life.

Reference has been made in Chapter Two to the resolution of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church of 1896 concerning the needs of the aged, among others, which calls for the establishment of institutions of aid throughout the denomination. Although this branch of the Church was not inactive in the field of ministering to the general needs of the aging during the following years, there is no specific reference to the total needs of the aged, as such, in the General Conference actions from 1896 to 1960. The official means of response was to be found in references to the need for more adequate pensions for ministers in their retirement and the development of various homes for

the aged.

These early days of the Evangelical Association in the twentieth century, according to the records of the General Conferences, were also concerned mainly in the area of adequate pension programs for their retired ministers and the development of homes for the aged, also. The Charitable Fund, which had been established in 1832 and strengthened by the formation of the Charitable Society in 1835, was leading the way from a response to the needy retired ministers at the point of need, to the establishment of a true pension fund which was to come a little later. By 1907 the General Conference Journal of the Evangelical Association lists a standing Committee on Benevolent Work, with the concern for the needy aged among its several responsibilities.

The concerns for the aged among the United Brethren in Christ were also to be seen primarily through its statements and actions on behalf of the needy retired ministers and through the founding of homes for needy aged. Dating back to the reference of the Conference of 1802, when a proposal was made relating to the collecting of money for needy ministers, recognition was given to such need, but little, if anything, was done. In 1901 this concern was presented to the General Conference, but it did not fare any better than previous recommendations. At this same time there was a standing Committee on Old People's Home, Orphanage and Hospital of General Conference, encouraging the development of institutions for the needy, including the aged. The

Bishop's Address to the General Conference of 1909 did indicate a concern for the poor and aged in the general society when reference was made to the needs of the "industrial toilers" for suitable provision for the old age of workers and for those who had been incapacitated by injury.¹ It was not until the report of the Committee on Social Service and Reform, made to the General Conference of 1913, that such concern was again expressed.

DEVELOPMENT OF HOMES FOR THE AGED

Because of the stated major concern of all three branches of the United Methodist Church in the early twentieth century with the development of homes for the aged, we shall especially note the attitude of the churches in the early 1900s in this area of work. It was mainly the concern for the poor and needy which gave impetus to the development of such homes. By 1900 the Methodist Episcopal Church, mainly through its Annual Conferences or the Deaconess Board, had established 17 homes serving the aged. The Evangelical Association had opened two such homes prior to the turn of the century. The United Brethren in Christ had not yet entered into this field of service, but would be within just a few years. The attitude toward those being served by the homes was purely benevolence to the needy. In the report of the Superintendent of the Altenheim (Ebenezer Old People's Home) of

¹Minutes of the General Conference of the United Brethren Church, 1909 (Dayton, Ohio: United Brethren Publishing House, 1909), p. 23.

Ebenezer, New York, given to the 1907 General Conference of the Evangelical Association, the residents of the home were referred to as "inmates."² He also spoke in a very complaining manner concerning the lack of support the Church in general was giving to the homes. The concept of the needs of the residents of these homes was emphasized throughout the years as indicated in the 1915 report of the Superintendent of this same Ebenezer Home when he said,

The Home has brought comfort and joy into many lives, has kept many aged persons from the worries of life because of meager means for support, and become a pleasant home to many who had no home, and were not welcome in the homes of relatives and sometimes not even in the homes of children, whom they reared and loved.³

Emphasis on keeping the aged poor in comfort as they awaited death continued to be a basic concept of ministry. As late as 1938, the report of the Superintendent of the Haven Hubbard Memorial Old People's Home, given to General Conference, included the words,

This is a splendid haven for the aged pilgrims of the church. All who support it are helping to render a real service to a very needy and worthy group of old, who often through no fault of their own, are direly in need of just such a haven to round out their closing years of life. . . . This Home should become the place of preparation for the next step, into that home beyond.⁴

²Proceedings of the General Conference of the Evangelical Association, 1907 (Cleveland, Ohio: Publishing house of the Evangelical Association, 1907), p. 71.

³Proceedings of the General Conference of the Evangelical Association, 1915 (Cleveland, Ohio: Publishing House of the Evangelical Association, 1915), p. 161.

⁴Proceedings of the General Conference of the Evangelical Association, 1938 (Cleveland, Ohio: Publishing House of the Evangelical Association, 1938), p. 161.

This emphasis on homes for aged needy continued through all three branches of the present United Methodist Church. From the 17 homes at the beginning of the century in the Methodist Episcopal Church, the number had grown to 44 in 1920. It reached 45 listed homes in 1936, and remained in that approximate range until after the Second World War. Again the building of such homes increased following the war until 96 were reported in 1960. In 1925 the report to the Board of Hospitals and Homes stated:

Homes for the Aged are an essential part of the philanthropic program of the church. The Christian care of the aged is enjoined upon the church by Jesus and was practiced by the early church and especially commended by St. Paul, as he took offerings for the aged poor in the various churches. John Wesley gave much attention to the needs of the worthy aged poor among the membership of the early Methodist societies.⁵

It is helpful to note the intent of these homes as indicated by their structure and programing. This same report describes a day in a home for the aged sponsored by the Methodist Episcopal Church:

Morning comes in the Home for the Aged with all its possibilities and problems just as in any other home. But it is a Christian home and the atmosphere is such as to encourage the very best use of the hours. Breakfast brings our aged guests to a moment of prayer and song. Those able to do so participate in the work of the dining room. All give attention to the care of their room. Then comes the reading of their letters and the church paper. A walk into town may occupy a part of the morning or afternoon. Lunch brings

cal Church, 1938 (No city or publisher indicated), p. 359.

⁵Report to the Board of Hospitals and Homes of the Episcopal Church, 1925, p. 31.

them together again. Friends sometimes call in the afternoon to vary the hours of reading or sewing. And then comes twilight, wooer of thoughts of other days. The Home for the Aged becomes so many individual homes peopled with the loved ones gone before. What a blessing that these men and women have a home like this in which to dream over the bygone days and to watch the vision of that final glorious sunrise! After supper there may be prayer meeting (there usually is family prayers) or a group of young people from some nearby church may come in to help while away the hours. Or perhaps the radio is tuned in and the wide world brought into the gathering. It is like any Christian home, and those who live there have the joy of realizing that the day well spent brings an evening of joyous reflection. And most of our old people retire at the evening's end with happy hearts though lonely for the voices of those whom they brought into the world.⁶

Over the years it did become evident to those working with the homes for the aged that a change was occurring in the actuarial expectations of those who lived in such homes. In 1928, the report of the Board of Hospitals and Homes to the General Conference said, "It has been proved without question that aged people live ten years longer in a Home than those who do not have such good care in their own individual homes."⁷ The need for this good care continued to be voiced through the years in the Methodist Church as the Board of Hospitals and Homes stated to the 1936 General Conference: "The care of aged and needy people has become a prime consideration of the Church. There are many aged people who have lost all relatives and friends and have come

⁶Ibid., p. 31-32.

⁷General Conference Minutes of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1928 (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1928), p. 1584.

to the close of life without anyone to give care and attention to them."⁸ The recognition of the need for care for such persons caused the 1956 General Conference to adopt the 12 point program of "Christianity in Action" which listed one of the points: "Develop homes for older persons to meet increasing needs."⁹ The rate at which these homes developed during the first 50 years of the century remained rather constant, as we have noted earlier, but began to accelerate rapidly following 1950. The decade from 1961 to 1970 proved to be the time of the greatest development of various types of institutions to minister to the aging in the history of the Methodist Church. Following the concept developed early in the life of the Methodist Episcopal Church, these homes were begun and continued primarily through the actions of the various Annual Conferences, and related to the denomination only by recognition in the listing of the Board of Hospitals and Homes. This was not the manner, as we shall see, of the Evangelical Church nor the United Brethren in Christ.

The work with homes for the aged among the Evangelicals very early became a full relationship with the entire denomination. In 1903, the Altenheim (Ebenezer Old People's Home), at Ebenezer, New York, was taken over by the General

⁸General Conference Minutes of the Methodist Church, 1936 (Nashville: Methodist Publishing House, 1936), p. 1095.

⁹General Conference Minutes of the Methodist Church, 1956 (Nashville: Methodist Publishing House, 1956), p. 1503.

Church after it had been in operation for six years through the efforts of the New York Conference. The other home of the Evangelical Church at the beginning of the century, The Old People's Home at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, did continue to be under the direct control of the Atlantic Conference, however, until 1922. At the General Conference of 1903 a commission was appointed, in response to the pleas of some of the western conferences, to consider an Altenheim in the west, since the only two homes of the denomination at that time were in the east. At the 1907 General Conference a report was given on this study, indicating the name to be Seybert Old People's Home, and the location to be either in Chicago, Ottawa, Illinois, or Lormira, Wisconsin. By 1911 this new home was established in Cedar Falls, Iowa, rather than in any of the recommended locations, and the name was "Western Old People's Home," being dedicated in 1912. The next home added by the Evangelicals was the Haven Hubbard Memorial Old People's Home at New Carlisle, Indiana, made possible through the generous gift of Mrs. Armina Hubbard. This home was opened in 1923, with the Episcopal Address of the 1922 General Conference praising the Hubbards by saying, "This outpouring of two hearts filled with solicitude for old folks who are homeless has filled the entire Church with its fragrance."¹⁰ It was also at this time that the Pacific Evangelical Home for the Aged at Burbank, California,

¹⁰Proceedings of the General Conference of the Evangelical Church, 1922 (no publisher indicated), p. 41.

was organized, largely through the gifts of Mrs. F. W. Voegelein and Mr. and Mrs. Isaac Burkhardt.

The smaller of the Evangelical groups, The United Evangelical Church, had been seeking to establish a home for the aged for many years. Father Adolph Weidemeyer presented a gift to the Church in 1897 of \$115 for this cause. In 1907 this money was transferred to the Central Pennsylvania Conference, and in 1910 the Conference started plans for an Orphans' and Old Folks' Home. In 1915 the Slifer Farm was bought, and finally the first guests were admitted in 1916. Thus, at the time of the union of the Evangelical Association and the United Evangelical Church in 1922, the united body listed as homes for the aged: Ebenezer Old People's Home, Haven Hubbard Memorial Old People's Home, Western Old People's Home, Pacific Evangelical Home for the Aged, Evangelical Home for the Aged in Philadelphia, and the former United Evangelical Home which had been named Evangelical Home at Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. In addition, the Evangelical Church had three homes in Europe, one at Interlaken, Switzerland, one at Honau, Germany, and one at Windungen, Germany.

The effectiveness of these homes for the aged can be reflected in the report of the superintendent of the Ebenezer Home to the General Conference of the Evangelical Church in 1922:

The religious needs of these aged people form an important part of our endeavors. Our Old People's Home is to us not only an institution which

provides for the temporal necessities of life, but we endeavor to foster the spiritual life of the whole family, and the associations and Christian fellowship have been very pleasant and encouraging. Most of these aged pilgrims are very grateful for the home which the Church is giving them, and while they appreciate these temporal blessings they cherish and rejoice in the hope of a future blessed immortality and the life to come.¹¹

This was the philosophy and intent of all of the homes of the three branches of what is now the United Methodist Church as they worked through the early years of the twentieth century.

The management of these homes for the aged has not been without its problems during these years. The Evangelical Church began to receive reports in 1926 that the Pacific Home had a relatively few guests, and the Ebenezer Home was operating in a deficit and needed urgent help. The weight of these problems caused the General Conference to pass a resolution forbidding the undertaking of any benevolent institution by gift or any other way during the quadrennium unless advised by the Board of Bishops because of an unusual situation.¹² Largely because of this difficulty of maintaining the homes they had, no new ones were begun until 1962, well after the formulation of the Evangelical United Brethren Church. However, even though there were numerous references over the years to the possibility of the closing of the Pacific Home, and the uniting of the Philadelphia and

¹¹ Ibid., p. 121.

¹² Proceedings of the General Conference of the Evangelical Church, 1926 (no publisher indicated), p. 184.

Lewisburg Homes, only the Ebenezer Home was finally closed with the Haven Hubbard Home receiving the small residue of funds from its sale.

The United Brethren in Christ followed a pattern in two of their three homes different from that of the Methodists or Evangelicals. They combined the service to the aged and the service to the orphans in the same institution. An Old People's Home was begun in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, in 1903, largely through the efforts of Rev. and Mrs. Z. A. Colestock who left their farm for this purpose. Approximately the same time an orphanage was begun at Quincy, Pennsylvania, through the work of H. J. Kitzmiller, who also donated a farm to the church. In 1909 the Mechanicsburg home became recognized as an institution of the General Church, and in 1913 the two were merged into the Quincy Orphanage and Home. The General Conference also determined in 1913 that another orphanage and home for the aged should be developed in Ohio to be known as Otterbein Home. This was a very sizeable venture which was eventually to have six different homes in the project: (1) Home and training school for orphans and other needy children; (2) Home for children of missionaries; (3) Old folk's home, by cottage and dormitory plan; (4) Home for deaconesses; (5) Home for retired ministers and wives, cottage and dormitory plan; and (6) Healthatorium for church workers. Even though not all of the goals were reached, the zeal and foresight of this venture can best be comprehended in the conclusion of the

report of the Otterbein Home to the 1917 General Conference of the United Brethren Church:

The number of old people is bound to increase with the years, unless restricted by injurious discrimination. It is our confidence that God and his people will supply the means as demanded, and that large buildings and cottages will take their place on the Home grounds in orderly growth. He who inspired one to say that pure religion and undefiled before God, and the Father consists in visiting the fatherless and the widow, will not withdraw the declaration when its spirit is more than followed out by providing a training home for the fatherless and a hospitable place for refuge for the widow, and by preparing other homes which are needed as sadly as are these two. Nor is the Father likely to withhold his approval from the most sane means and sensible methods of procuring support for such a cause. The worthiness and the righteousness of this work, so long deferred in our denomination, promoted first by Quincy Orphanage and Home, calls for an unqualified devotion to its speedy development to atone for the long years of oversight and indifference. To such a task, let us devote ourselves, recognizing it a Christian duty to respond to the call of need, being conscious of the divine approval in relieving distress, and laying foundation for Christian character.¹³

A part of the support of these homes was to come from special Christmas offerings which would be raised in every United Brethren Church throughout the denomination. This was enacted in 1913.¹⁴

A unique type of home was established in California in 1911 called the Col. R. M. Baker Home for Retired Ministers. Begun through the efforts of Col. Baker and his wife, Sarah

¹³Proceedings of the General Conference of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, 1917 (Dayton, Ohio: United Brethren Publishing House, 1917), p. 295.

¹⁴Proceedings of the General Conference of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, 1913 (Dayton, Ohio: United Brethren Publishing House, 1913), p. 623.

A. Baker, this home was to offer cottages to retired ministers where they could spend the closing years of their lives. As stated in one of their reports to General Conference, "The purpose of the Home, as set forth by the founders, is to supply, rent free, a cottage home with garden space for vegetables, fruits and flowers, for retired ministers and their wives, and other persons of our church."¹⁵

At the union of the Evangelical Church and the United Brethren in Christ in 1946, nine homes for the aged were listed in the denomination, plus one home in Switzerland and one in South Germany. In 1958 the final dissolution of the Ebenezer Old People's Home was noted, leaving eight homes for the aged in the Evangelical United Brethren Church on this continent. It was becoming more evident that the need for homes for the aged was growing in the society and the denomination sought to respond. The report of the Western Home to General Conference in 1954 noted:

Demand is making homes for the aged more popular with each passing year. Statistics indicate there are four times as many persons past sixty years of age now as there were in 1910, assuring us that one person in ten will be 60 years or more by 1960.¹⁶

This was followed with the appeal by the Committee on Benevolent Institutions in its 1958 report in saying:

¹⁵Proceedings of the General Conference of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, 1937 (Dayton, Ohio: Otterbein Press, 1937), p. 251.

¹⁶Proceedings of the General Conference of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, 1954 (Dayton, Ohio: Otterbein Press, 1954), p. 370.

It is the opinion of this Committee that it is imperative that such a study (of the Benevolent Institutions) be undertaken immediately, in the light of changes which are occurring with lightning-like rapidity in the field of child care, the care of aging people, and in the profession of Pediatrics and Geriatrics. Policies of government in welfare work also enter into the situation so that the needs and policies of our Benevolent Homes in the last quadrennium are dramatically and unbelievably changed in this present quadrennium.¹⁷

At the 1958 and 1962 General Conferences it was noted that a number of areas and Annual Conferences were interested in the establishment of homes for the aged, further underlining the scope of need. The 1962 General Conference noted the establishing of Friendly Acres in Newton, Kansas, which made it the only new home to be started by the denomination in approximately 40 years. This same General Conference, however, determined that any new homes should be established on a self-supporting basis as far as possible, without expecting help from denominational funds.

Within the jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church, the control of all homes for the aged has been passed to the corporations holding the homes, and these homes have been related to specific annual conferences for any support as well as the seeking of residents. The denominational tie to these various institutions has come through the responsibility of the Department of Health and Welfare which certifies the agencies and seeks to be a governing control over them

¹⁷Proceedings of the General Conference of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, 1958 (Dayton, Ohio: Otterbein Press, 1958), p. 415.

only as far as acceptable standards are concerned. Currently there are 160 certified or affiliated homes for the aged in the United Methodist Church, with 9 additional homes which are not certified, but which are recognized as relating to some United Methodist entity, usually an Annual Conference.

MULTIPLE HOME CORPORATIONS

Throughout various areas of the United Methodist Church there has appeared over the years several sizeable complexes of homes for the aged, usually in combination with health care facilities. These are all related to a single Annual Conference, and developed in several different ways. The United Methodist Homes of New Jersey, which operates seven facilities, traces its roots back to 1890 when "The Home for the Aged and Infirm of the Methodist Episcopal Church of the County of Camden" was incorporated. Another of its facilities began in 1896 when the Women's Home Missionary Society opened the "Bancroft-Taylor Rest Home" in Ocean Grove, a vacation home for missionaries and deaconesses. However, it was the "Monmouth Methodist Episcopal Home for the Aged" founded in 1907, which became the center about which the entire complex was developed. The concept of a multiple home corporation did not emerge until a second home was built at Branchville (Methodist Manor) in 1961. Then followed the building of two more homes and the acceptance of the Epworth Manor, Collingswood Manor, and Wesley Homestead,

all Methodist institutions, into the Methodist Homes of New Jersey.

The history of the Pacific Homes of California is somewhat similar to that of New Jersey. In 1912 the German Methodist Conference, including California, opened a home for retired ministers at a campground outside of Los Angeles, in what is now Hollywood. Later this facility became known as Kingsley Manor, under the direction of the Pacific Old People's Home Incorporation. In the period from 1949 to 1964, the corporation became known as Pacific Homes, and acquired six additional properties, including one in Arizona and one in Hawaii. Some of these were homes which were brought into the corporation and some homes that were established by them.

Three multiple homes corporations have come into the field in more recent years. The Virginia United Methodist Homes, operating six facilities, began with the formation of Heritage in Richmond in 1949, then expanding during the early 1960s by developing four more homes. A private facility, the Lydia H. Roper Home, which had been in operation since 1921, was also added to this corporation. This pattern was duplicated as well with the establishment of the Scranton Home in 1959 in Pennsylvania, which gave rise to the development of the Methodist Homes for the Aging of the Wyoming Conference. Although the Scranton Home was phased out, beginning in 1974, because of its inadequate facilities, this complex has developed six other homes since 1961 which are

in full service to the elderly. This includes the Norwich Retirement Center opened in 1979. Latest in this list of multiple home corporations is the Wesley Homes of Georgia, which also operates seven facilities. Beginning in 1965 with the opening of Wesley Woods Towers, they have added six more units throughout Georgia in a rapidly developing complex. In addition to these above mentioned corporations, there are numerous other corporations which direct two to four units each, and may well develop into larger multi-unit services.

DENOMINATIONAL SUPERVISION

Within the Methodist back ground especially, and within the Evangelical and United Brethren to some extent, there was evidenced early in the century the need for some closer supervision of homes for the elderly in both financial matters and health care fields. As was noted in Chapter Two, the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church acted on this need for closer supervision of facilities ministering to the needy in 1896. This action called for the Committee on Temporal Economy to report a plan, "wise in detail and broad in scope" for the development of orphanages, homes for the aged and hospitals which would be under the care of the Church.¹⁸ The report of this study is not indicated in future minutes of General Conferences until 1912, when church sponsored Hospitals are mentioned, but not the

¹⁸Journal of General Conference of Methodist Episcopal Church, 1896 (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1896), p. 155.

homes. It was in 1920 that a Board of Hospitals and Homes was established by the Methodist Episcopal Church, reporting 44 homes for the aged then in existence. To the following General Conference, 1924, this Board reported the establishing of a Department of Survey and Standardization, and that 34 of the homes for the aged had not met the standards established.¹⁹ There was also much attention given to the financial development of such homes, and the creation of a Department of Homes for the Aged within the Board. The responsibility of this Department was stated as follows:

Through the Department special study has been made of the needs of Homes for the Aged people. The standards have been adopted and much emphasis has been placed upon the necessity for the proper care of the finances of the institution as well as the finances of the guests in the Home. The development of the religious atmosphere of the institutions and the social welfare of the guests have been studied.²⁰

It can be noted the residents of these homes for the aged are no longer called "inmates" as an earlier report had stated, but now are being called "guests."

The stated concern of the Evangelical Church over the regulation of the homes for the aged does not appear until 1926 when the General Conference, as has earlier been noted, because of the difficulties a number of the homes were experiencing financially, forbid the development of any new benevolent institutions without the express consent of the

¹⁹General Conference Minutes, The Methodist Episcopal Church, 1924 (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1924), p. 1553.

²⁰Ibid., p. 1557.

Board of Bishops, and this only in unusual instances. At the following General Conference of 1930 it was recommended that a Commission on Homes and Benevolent Institutions be appointed by the Board of Bishops to "work out during the coming quadrennium a plan of supervision and correlation of the work of all Homes, Deaconess Work, and Hospitals, connected with the Evangelical Church in America."²¹ However, there is no indication that such a report was ever presented in subsequent General Conferences.

The United Brethren in Christ also recognized early the need for the supervision of institutions of benevolent nature in the church and gave some direction to this work in the 1901 General Conference when the Standing Committee on Old People's Home, Orphanage and Hospital stated:

We believe that it is the duty of the Church to provide for the infirm, fatherless, and worthy poor in our midst. . . . That with the consent of the Board of Bishops, any conference or number of conferences may unite in founding an Old People's Home, Orphanage, or Hospital. . . . That the board of trustees shall be incorporated, and shall hold all property in trust for the Church of the United Brethren in Christ. . . . That it shall be the duty of the Board of Bishops to present the above interests to each annual conference in the district, and give them all necessary encouragement.²²

This position was followed in 1909 in establishing a committee on Orphanages and Old People's Homes by the General

²¹Proceedings of the General Conference of the Evangelical Church, 1930 (no publisher indicated), p. 144.

²²Proceedings of the General Conference of the Church of United Brethren in Christ, 1901 (Dayton, Ohio: United Brethren Publishing House, 1901), p. 555.

Conference. This action far pre-dated similar action within the other two branches of the United Methodist Church. There is, however, no other reference within the work of the United Brethren Church to the official establishment of standards for these homes under its supervision.

The Evangelical United Brethren Church continued the concern of its former branches in studying the long-range mission of the homes for the aged and for orphans with the aim at making them more effective in service. In 1962 the Study Commission on Benevolent Homes recommended the revising of the constitutions of the homes of the Church, including a statement of purpose and structure which would bring them into line with the current concept of needs and procedures in the field.²³ The trend to separate the homes from other concerns of those in need was reversed at this time when a Department of Health and Welfare was established to oversee all work of the denominational homes and hospitals as well as social service agencies. Further supervision of this work at the denominational level came at the following General Conference of 1966 when the Department of Health and Welfare reported:

The members of the Department have sought to become better informed on the needs of children and aging so that it might take some leadership in new and creative approaches to ministries to such persons. Encouragement has been given to

²³Proceedings of the General Conference of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, 1962 (Dayton, Ohio: Otterbein Press, 1962), p. 285.

experimentation in the areas of non-institutional care of the aging.²⁴

The concern of the standards by which homes for the aging, as well as other social service agencies, conduct their work under the name of the United Methodist Church has been, and is being, continued under the certification program of the current Board of Health and Welfare Ministries.

WORK OF THE DEACONESS SOCIETY

From the beginning of the concern for the elderly, the Deaconess Society has played an important role, especially within the Methodist Church. The ministry of these homes was two-fold. One was to serve the aged workers of the church, primarily the single women who had given their lives in the service as deaconesses, as well as retired missionaries, and at times, the retired ministers. The secondary phase of these homes was the continuation of the work of the deaconesses in serving the needy, including the needy elderly. Records are not clear as to the order of development of these homes. An Old People's Home was begun in 1889 by the Methodist Deaconess Society in the Rock River Conference area of Illinois. In 1890 there was also a Deaconess Old People's Home established in Spokane, Washington. Another home, the Agard Deaconess Rest Home, was founded at Lake Bluff, Illinois, in 1895, for the use of deaconesses and missionaries needing rest or retirement. A later report of the

²⁴Proceedings of the General Conference of Evangelical United Brethren Church, 1966 (Dayton, Ohio: Otterbein Press, 1966), p. 74.

Deaconess Society listed in addition the Methodist Episcopal Old People's Home in Chicago, Illinois, begun in 1898, as well as the Methodist Episcopal Home for the Aged at College Hill, Cincinnati, Ohio, founded in 1899. This report speaks of the Cincinnati home as being "the second deaconess home for the aged and the first in the world as to building and equipment."²⁵ This reference to the "second home" makes the sequence very unsure. The home in Chicago was instituted largely through the work of Bishop Merrill.

Deaconesses also found aid in their declining years through the work of the Women's Home Missionary Society, noted earlier, as they established the Bancroft Rest Home in Ocean Grove, New Jersey, in 1896, for the use of missionaries and deaconesses. This parallel sponsorship of homes for aged of the Deaconess Society and the Board of Hospitals and Homes continued for over 25 years, at times with distinct confusion of responsibility, especially on the part of the Board. In 1924 the General Conference ordered the Deaconess Society and the Board of Hospitals and Homes to consolidate. This did not end the work of the deaconess movement, but did bring under one control these very similar ministries.

DEVELOPMENT OF PENSION PLANS

The second of the major evidences of the concern of the prior bodies of the United Methodist Church for the aging,

²⁵ General Conference Journal of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1912 (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1912), p. 1395

along with the work with homes for the aging, came in the concern for the care of retired ministers and their families. This came with the development of the concept of the pension programs. For the Methodist Church, the roots are traced back to the very beginning at the Christmas Conference of 1784. There the signers of the Annual Conference records were asked to contribute two dollars each year at Conference time to help the "worn out" preachers or their dependents. When admitted as a traveling preacher, there was added another 20 shillings, Pennsylvania currency. This fund was strengthened in 1789 by directing that a part of the profit from the newly established publishing house would go to the Preachers' Fund. Following this directive the Book Concern paid in 1791 the total sum of 61 pounds, 11 shillings to the needy preachers. By 1792 this amount to be shared had increased to \$266.33. Later in 1798 this Fund became known as the Chartered Fund.

Through the years this Chartered Fund continued to be supported mainly by the publishing interests of the Church. Help was offered to those who could not continue to preach because of either age or disability, as well as for widows of preachers or their orphans. During the division of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Church South determined in 1888 that the profits from the publishing activities would be paid directly to the various Annual Conferences to be distributed through the Conference Claimants procedure each Conference had established. This pattern followed throughout

the entire Methodist Church and was incorporated into the United Methodist union. In 1928 the General Conference of the Methodist Church formed the Ministers' Reserve Pension Fund, which was not technically a general church pension plan, but a plan and a fund which would serve as the vehicle by which the several Annual Conferences could bring some unity into their manner of dealing with the pension program. This has continued to the present as the basic pension program of the United Methodist Church.

It has also been noted in the history of the early Evangelical Association the formation, in 1832, of the Charitable Fund. This became the Charitable Society of the Evangelical Association in 1835. This plan also was given support through the profits of the Evangelical Publishing House during all of its years. Added support of this concept was urged in 1907 when the General Conference Committee on Ways and Means said, "We believe that the ministry should not be compelled to live from hand to mouth, as has been the case in many instances in the past, but should be able to set apart some of the income for support of old age and disability."²⁶ The urgent need for the enlargement of this help program was emphasized in the Episcopal Address of the 1911 General Conference. In it the Bishops said,

This worthy Society was established many years since by Bishop John Seybert. Since its organization it has annually contributed a liberal amount towards the support of our needy superannuated

²⁶Proceedings, Evangelical Association, 1907, p. 139.

ministers, and the widows and orphans of deceased preachers. However, at no time have its funds been sufficient properly to support these worthy objects of benevolence. Nor has the Church at any time done its duty towards its aged ministers or the widows of deceased preachers.²⁷

It was at the same General Conference of 1911 the recommendation was made that a fund be established which would adequately support retired ministers on more than a need basis. In response to this plea, the Superannuation Fund was adopted, which would be supported by all the congregations, by the minister's contributions, and by additional gifts. All itinerant ministers would be members and an informal Mutual Benefit Society, which had earlier been formed, would be merged with this new Superannuation Fund. During the following quadrennium, 1911-1915, a concerted effort was made throughout the entire church to raise funds to underwrite this need. Conference solicitors were appointed in many conferences with good effectiveness, causing the 1915 General Conference to call for conference solicitors in every conference. Even the Young People's Alliance pledged \$50,000 to the Fund to be paid in four years. In addition to solicited gifts and the Superannuation Fund Day offerings in local churches, a 3 percent salary contribution from the ministers was levied as well as a 12 percent contribution from each local church on the basis of the individual minister's salary paid. During this time the Charitable Society was still in

²⁷Proceedings of the General Conference of the Evangelical Association, 1911 (Cleveland, Ohio: Publishing House of the Evangelical Association, 1911), p. 38.

operation for the relief of specific cases of need among retired ministers or their families.

Transferring the concept of aid to retired ministers into the concept of rightful deferred payments for services rendered, the Episcopal Message of 1926 stated:

The Evangelical Church has adopted the principle that the title to ministerial support is inherent in the Christian ministry and that such support is not exhausted by the period of active service but continues after the minister's retirement by reason of disability or advanced age and extends to the widow and minor children. This is not an attitude of charity but of inherent right and justice.²⁸

By that time nearly 96 percent of the eligible itinerant ministers were enrolled in the Superannuation Fund. The success of this plan brought the permanent funds of the Charitable Society into the Superannuation Fund in 1930, as well as caused the Publishing House to pledge an additional \$2.00 of annuity for each year of active service for the itinerants. However, in 1934 the Board of Publication discontinued their support of the Fund, causing a deep consternation concerning the ability of the Fund to pay the annuities on a full basis. The support of the Superannuation Fund was not reported in 1938, but by 1942 the report stated the Board of Publications did give grants to the Superannuation Fund of \$44,500 for the previous quadrennium.²⁹ It was at this time the Pension Fund was suggested as a substitute for the

²⁸Proceedings, Evangelical Church, 1926, p. 275

²⁹Proceedings of the General Conference of the Evangelical Church, 1942 (no publisher indicated), p. 255.

Superannuation Fund with all itinerant ministers having to join the Pension Fund as a condition of itinerancy.

The development of pension programs within the United Brethren Church was more aligned with Annual Conference structure than with the General Church. In 1861 a General Benevolent Fund was established "for the support of worn out preachers, to their widows, or otherwise, as such Annual Conferences may direct."³⁰ Since there were no funds available from the Printing Establishment, burdened as it was with debt, the funds for this project were to be raised through the Annual Conferences. The Annual Conference Preachers' Aid Society was proposed in 1901 with the object being "to provide for the aged and physically disabled itinerant ministers and their families."³¹ Each annual conference was to establish their own Society and have complete control of it. After considerable discussion, this proposal was not adopted. It was noted that eight such Societies did exist within the denomination at that time, but without common structure. Again in 1905 a Preachers' Aid Society for the entire denomination was proposed, and after much debate, was again rejected.

The first reference to any retirement pay being given by the denomination, as such, was in 1905 when action was taken to make two retiring bishops, Bishop N. Castle and Bishop

³⁰Proceedings, United Brethren Church, 1815-1873, p. 296.

³¹Proceedings, United Brethren Church, 1901, p. 573.

E. B. Kephart, Bishops Emeriti, and giving them one-half salary.³² This action on retired bishops later caused considerable discussion when it was also moved to give William McKee, Missionary Treasurer for 28 years, half pay on his retirement. This was finally voted down as creating a bad precedent since the denomination did not have a general pension program.³³ The need for some help to the retired ministers was again raised in 1909 with a call for a committee of nine to be appointed by the Board of Bishops to report at that General Conference. The Committee on Ministerial Relief then proposed a Ministerial Relief Bureau, the object of which would be "to provide a fund for the relief of superannuated ministers in the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, and their widows." Funds were to come from a 5 percent per member assessment in each annual conference, a Publishing House contribution of at least \$5,000 annually, and special offerings and gifts.³⁴ In the discussion it was noted the Discipline already provided for retired ministers and their widows and orphans to be aided by their annual conferences according to need. The Ministerial Relief Bureau was adopted. A substitute motion, calling for a Ministerial Pension Fund, did not prevail. The Committee on Ministerial

³²Proceedings of the General Conference of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, 1905 (Dayton, Ohio: United Brethren Publishing House, 1905), p. 219.

³³Ibid., p. 234.

³⁴Proceedings, United Brethren Church, 1909, p. 685.

Relief, in 1913, recommended the establishing of a general Pensions Bureau, much more defined than in 1909, and this recommendation was adopted. This voluntary plan remained in effect until 1937 when the Ministerial Pension and Annuity Plan was approved, making it mandatory that all ministers entering the itinerancy after January 1, 1941, must become members of the Plan.³⁵ The maximum pension was set at \$500 per year.

With the formation of the Evangelical United Brethren Church in 1946, the Pension Fund, as recommended by the Evangelical Church in 1942, became the plan for all new itinerant ministers. The Charitable Society of the Evangelical Association and the Charitable Society of the United Evangelical Church had continued in form, although their function had been almost entirely covered by the Pension and Superannuation plans. In 1958 these two agencies were finally dissolved. The pension programs became increasingly that of the Pension Fund which was based on the individual minister's salary with contributions from both the minister and the local church. Pension payments would come from the accumulation in the individual account at the time of retirement.

Since the inception of the Ministers' Reserve Pension Fund of the Methodist Church, and following the formation of the United Methodist Church, each Annual Conference has

³⁵Proceedings, United Brethren Church, 1937, p. 265.

determined its mode of pension calculations, based in relationship to the Fund. The scale of pension payments is determined yearly by the individual conferences, based on an amount for years of service, paying all claimants at the same rate. The individual conferences make this determination out of the income of whatever funds they have available: ministerial contributions, contributions from local churches (usually based on average cash salary paid within the Conference), income from the Publishing House, gifts and other bequests. In 1977 there were 58 of the Annual Conferences which were full participants in the Ministers' Reserve Pension Fund, and 7 conferences which participated in a partial way. Seven conferences were not participating in this general church program at all. Per year of service benefits ranged in 1978 from a high of \$135 to a low of \$60. At that time only a little over 36 percent of the pension liability throughout the denomination was funded.³⁶

In 1977 a Pension Study Task Force was established by the Board of Pensions in an effort to establish a more stable and funded pension program. The intent is for a new pension program to be presented to the General Conference of 1980. Initial presentations of the concept indicate a program which still allows annual conferences to have some area of choice, but link the payments into the fund and the benefits from the fund directly to the deposits credited to the account of

³⁶General Board of Pensions Annual Report (New York: The United Methodist Church, 1977), pp. 13, 16.

each minister, thus making a fully funded program for the future.

DEVELOPMENT OF BASIC CONCEPTS

The twentieth century evidenced a broad shift in the concept of the United Methodist Church and its predecessors concerning its ministry to the aging. It began the century with the concept of helping the needy wherever they may be found, including the needy elderly, and aiding these elderly toward a death with a sound faith in Christ. It was, in essence, a "holding pattern" until life would end shortly. The current concept has developed with the understanding that the later years of life for the great majority of our society is still a time of vital living which needs to be enlarged with the infusion of an applicable Christian faith. It has come to the place of advocating "abundant maturity." The need for the proclamation of such a concept is still urgent today, as evidenced in the comment of a talk show guest who, in referring to the television program "The Young and the Restless," said he was going to start a new soap opera: "The Old and the Hopeless." This is the attitude and concept the United Methodist Church today is seeking to dispel as being untrue for most aging persons, at least unnecessary if the Church does its work.

It took many years for the changing concepts of the life of the aging to penetrate into the United Methodist Church. As has been noted earlier, the ministry of the homes for the

aged was seen as the Church's answer to the County Farm. The emphasis was still on the subject of death. In 1909, the Committee on Orphanages and Old People's Homes of the United Brethren Church referred to the institution at Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, as "an institution of great need in our Zion; where our worthy, aged poor in need of a home can spend the remaining days of their earthly career."³⁷ The report of this same Home in 1921 carried the statement concerning the residents, "These old people as wards of the Church, have every comfort and ministration needed to enable them to peacefully pass the evening time of life, and directed to the home on high."³⁸ As late as 1938, the report of the superintendent of the Haven Hubbard Memorial Old People's Home said, "This Home should become the place of preparation for the next step, into that home beyond."³⁹

The coming of the 1940s indicated the swift change that altered the concept which the Church, as well as society as a whole, held concerning the elderly. The Episcopal Message at the Evangelical General Conference of 1942 noted, "There seems to be a marked change in parts of the country in the attitude of people toward Old People's Homes. Formerly many regarded such Homes somewhat in the light of a County Home or infirmary. Now more people, having more definite

³⁷Minutes, United Brethren Church, 1909, p. 836.

³⁸Proceedings, United Brethren Church, 1921, p. 263.

³⁹Proceedings of General Conference of the Evangelical Church, 1938 (no publisher indicated), p. 359.

knowledge of how these homes operate and the Christian ministry they are rendering, are making inquiry for entrance into the same."⁴⁰ The report of the Western Old People's Home reflected recognition of this same change in attitude toward homes for the aging. The quadrennial report of the same Haven Hubbard Home which stressed in 1938 the ending of life for its residents, eight years later evidenced an entirely different insight.

A new day is rapidly materializing. Institutions for our aged are being lifted in the thinking of people from the former "infirmary" category to the plane of much desired and sought after "real homes" both by the needy and also by those who through observation and the glowing testimonies of many "home members," have realized our Homes present an opportunity for pleasant surroundings, good care, and a complete sense of physical and mental security. We do not wish to, and should not, shun the enlarging field of service to many who have loyally supported the cause of righteousness and now seek a place of rest and spiritual environment for their declining years; while their more fortunate financial status, when welcomed into the fellowship of our homes for the aged, makes possible an increased measure of service to a larger number of those with limited resources.⁴¹

This is the first reference to the Church responding to those who are in financial health needing assistance in housing during the later years of their lives. The continuation of this concept can be seen in the position of the Evangelical United Brethren Church taken in 1962 that any new homes established should be self-supporting as far as

⁴⁰Proceedings of the General Conference of the Evangelical Church, 1942 (no publisher indicated), p. 148.

⁴¹Proceedings of the General Conference of the Evangelical Church, 1946 (no publisher indicated), p. 250.

possible. This has not become the basic standard for the homes for the aging in general throughout the United Methodist Church, but the concept of providing alternative housing and congregate living for those who can afford to pay the full cost has been included in nearly every home in some form.

The serving of persons without regard to race has been a situation which has not received much attention within the Church over the years. With the exception of the work done by the Louisiana Conference in opening the LaFon Home for Aged Colored People in 1881, little, if anything was done in this area of concern during the next 100 years. The residents in all of the homes tended to be almost entirely white, even though their country of origin may have been from various European areas. It was not until the Uniting General Conference of the United Methodist Church that a statement on racial inclusiveness was included concerning the homes. At that time it was determined that the work of the denomination, including the homes for the aged, in as much as possible, "shall make their programs and services available to all persons, regardless of race."⁴²

CONCERN FOR AGING IN SOCIETY

Not all of the work with the aging nor the needs of the aging has been kept within the structure or internal program

⁴²General Conference Minutes of United Methodist Church, 1968 (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1968), p. 1507.

of the Church. At the beginning of this century there was a concern expressed for the adequate care of the retired workers. In the Bishop's Address to the 1909 General Conference of the United Brethren Church reference was made to the needs of the "industrial toilers," especially for suitable provision for the old age of such workers.⁴³ This stand was reiterated in 1913 by the report of the Committee on Social Service and Reform. At the following General Conference of 1917, this same Committee recommended support of the concept of old age and unemployment insurance, then being discussed nationally. This concern for the provisions for the old age of all citizens again was included by the Committee on Family, Public Morals, Temperance and Sabbath of the Evangelical Church in 1934 when it was stated as one of the specific principles and practices which would aid in the achievement of a Christian social order.⁴⁴ The General Conference of the Evangelical United Brethren Church expanded their concern for the coverage of retired workers in 1950, and in 1954 stated:

We affirm our belief that it is a Christian duty to provide adequate pensions or other forms of social security for the aged and disabled. We believe that a complete coverage of our population with pensions is possible only under government control. We believe, further, that the government should put Social Security on a reserve basis as it requires insurance companies to do.⁴⁵

⁴³Minutes, United Brethren Church, 1909, p. 46.

⁴⁴Proceedings of General Conference of the Evangelical Church, 1934 (no publisher indicated), p. 61.

⁴⁵Proceedings, Evangelical United Brethren Church, 1954, p. 327.

The Evangelical United Brethren Church expressed its concern in 1962 that the local churches and agencies work within the framework of society in enlarging the ministry of the Church outside that of the homes for the aging. This followed closely upon the completion of the First White House Conference on Aging held in 1961. The proposal for this action was extensive in scope, calling upon local congregations to be imaginative in their outreach. It was outlined as follows:

We believe that a greatly neglected field in our denomination is that of welfare services to aged people. It is our conviction that local churches, groups of local churches and annual conferences could render a great service in this field. We would recommend that study be given to this kind of service at all levels in our church. Such services would be rendered with a view to keeping aged persons in their own homes. Services might include shopping, domestic care, personal care, meal service, social visitation and even financial support. In some instances a group of churches or a conference might well consider the employment of a social worker to supervise this work.⁴⁶

The Church was beginning to recognize that not all of the ministry to the aging in the community was up to the government.

The White House Conference on Aging of 1961, made a great impact on the Methodist Church in its attitudes toward its ministry to the aging. In fact, the following resolution was adopted by the General Conference of 1960:

Whereas the problems associated with the care of the aging are among the greatest social and

⁴⁶Proceedings, Evangelical United Brethren Church, 1962, p. 292.

medical problems of the day, and
 Whereas Congress has recognized these problems by
 providing that a White House Conference on Aging
 be held in 1961, which will be preceded by Con-
 ferences in all the States, and
 Whereas these Conferences will result in many
 changes both at the national and state levels, and
 Whereas the Methodist Church through its local
 churches and its institutions has a vital interest
 and concern in the problems associated with aging,
 Now Therefore Be It Resolved that the Board of
 Hospitals and Homes and the Board of Christian
 Social Concerns be directed to make a broad study
 of the various problems associated with aging, as
 they pertain to the Church and its institutions,
 giving attention to present programs for local
 churches in the field of aging in order to avoid
 overlapping, and to make recommendations to the
 1964 General Conference for a future program for
 both our institutions and our local churches to
 the end that the added golden years may result in
 greater service to our society and to the church,
 bringing greater happiness and security to the
 aged.⁴⁷

In response to this directive, there was presented at the
 General Conference of 1964 a study entitled "Methodism Views
 Her Ministry With the Aging." A part of that study empha-
 sized the need to have Methodist representation in future
 national convocations on the aging.

The awareness throughout the denomination concerning
 the needs of the aging and our ministry to this segment of
 our population is evidenced in the various articles which
 appear with regularity now in our Church press. Such head-
 lines as "We Can't Put Age Requirements on Demands of Chris-
 tian Faith," "UMC Should Help Ease 'Agism,'" "Age, Life-
 style Integration Needs Planning," "Church Missing the Mark

⁴⁷General Conference Minutes of the Methodist Church,
1960 (Nashville: Methodist Publishing House, 1960), p. 1362.

On 'Agism' Issue," "Forced Retirement Opposed by Board as Injustice Against Aged," and "Mandatory Retirement Needed" do not strike one as being out of place within materials published by and for the United Methodist people today. One recent article in the Church press under the heading "Ministry to Elderly Boosted" began by saying,

Older persons--those 65 years old or older--are the fastest growing age group in the United Methodist Church. But up until now, there has been little offered in the church to train persons for ministry with this neglected, yet important, population of our church and society.⁴⁸

This precedes the announcement of the founding of the Poppele Center for Health and Welfare Studies at the St. Paul School of Theology begun in 1979. This is the first such program to be started by any United Methodist seminary.

The extent to which the United Methodist Church has come through this century from the holding pattern to the concept of vital living for the aging can be seen in the current statement in the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church, first expounded in 1972:

RIGHTS OF THE AGING

In a society that places primary emphasis on youth, those growing old in years are frequently isolated from the mainstream of social existence. We support social policies that integrate the aging into the life of the total community, including sufficient incomes, increased and non-discriminatory employment opportunities, and adequate medical care and housing within existing communities. We urge social policies and programs that ensure to the

⁴⁸Bea Jones, "Ministry to Elderly Boosted," United Methodist Reporter, November 16, 1979, p. 3.

aging the respect and dignity that is their right as senior members of the human community.⁴⁹

The United Methodist Church views its ministry with the aging, and the needs of the aging, as being more than merely providing comfort and care while awaiting death. The "Three-H" syndrome of believing that needs of the elderly can be adequately met by providing health care, housing, and hobbies for the idle hours is not valid when the Gospel offers vital living throughout all of the days of our lives. Alan K. Waltz has challenged, "If the church is sensitive, it can become a major caring institution, the one structure dealing with the whole person while other institutions increasingly specialize."⁵⁰ The church is seeking to be that major caring institution, developing a ministry which will increasingly serve all the elderly, not just the 5 percent who are in need of specialized institutional care. Perhaps as a denomination we are walking with Robert Browning as he said,

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be.⁵¹

⁴⁹General Conference Minutes of the United Methodist Church, 1972 (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1972), p. 1059.

⁵⁰United Methodist Reporter, January 2, 1976, p. 4.

⁵¹Robert Browning, "Rabbi Ben Ezra," in 1000 Quotable Poems, Vol. I, ed: Thomas C. Clark (Chicago: Willett, Clark & Co., 1937), p. 65.

Chapter Five

PATTERNS FOR LOCAL CHURCH INVOLVEMENT IN MINISTRY TO THE AGED

A study of the ministry with the aging in the United Methodist Church indicates the development over the years from the concept of such ministry being a sub-section of work with the poor and needy to a ministry legitimate in its own right. This work has come to take its recognized place beside such other programs as work with children, work with youth and similar ministries. For this reason, ministry with the aging has come to be an increasingly important work in the local churches. This, too, becomes a part of the total story of the development of the ministry to the aging in the United Methodist Church. The development at the denominational level has been noted in Chapter Four. It is the intent of this chapter to survey ministry with the aging which is being done within the local church. Such a survey does indicate the need and desire for much help by many of the leaders within the local churches in order to make this manner of ministry an effective part of the work of the majority of United Methodist congregations.

Local churches desiring an effective ministry with the aging may well review a listing of actions compiled by The National Benevolent Association, the Division of Social and

Health Services of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The difficulty found by local congregations in establishing such ministries was highlighted in several regional Interfaith Conferences on Aging and in denominational conferences with interfaith representation. The findings from these meetings stated,

In each instance church/synagogue leaders seemed reticent to face those steps in positive action over which they had control as they sought to plan an effective ministry to, for, and with the aging. Leaders were, instead, inclined to talk about action over which they had no control.¹

In response to these conclusions, a fifteen point test for action was developed from the thinking of Dr. David O. Moberg, Professor and Chairman of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, of Ms. Maggie Kuhn, Convenor of the "Gray Panthers," and of Donald F. Clingan, President of the Interfaith Coalition on Aging. These fifteen tests recommended are as follows: 1. Loneliness: elderly persons are lonely everywhere. 2. Architecture: how do churches plan their buildings? 3. Finances: how much is in the budget for ministry with the elderly? 4. Transportation: one of the chief needs of elderly. 5. Accentuation on Youth: easy to forget the aged. 6. Timing of Services: remembering that the elderly keep different hours. 7. Family Oriented Programing: needs of single member families. 8. Removal from Leadership

¹National Benevolent Association, Division of Social and Health Services of the Christian Church, compiler, "Fifteen Positive Tests for Action," Indianapolis, Indiana, n.d.

Roles: tendency to "shelve" the aging. 9. Loss of Respect and Dignity: low concept of the "retired." 10. Out of Sight - Out of Mind: putting the needy away. 11. New Worship Styles: meeting the needs of all. 12. Orientation to Social Action: allowing the aging to be of service to others. 13. Retirement Policies, Pension Plans, and Benefits: checking the congregation's policies and actions. 14. Democratic Planning for Elderly: encouraging elderly to participate in own program. 15. New Dimensions of Religious Education: offering preparation for living the later years.

Local churches are challenged by these fifteen tests for action. "Ask the above questions in your congregation. Are you facing them straightforwardly? They are 'positive tests for action' over which you DO HAVE CONTROL!"² Local United Methodist Churches throughout the entire United States were surveyed to see how they were meeting the challenge to minister with the aging today (see Appendices). The survey was begun with a contact to a District Superintendent within each of the Annual Conferences of the United Methodist Church. Each Superintendent was asked to identify up to three local churches within his Annual Conference which have an effective work with the aging. There were 49 responses out of the 67 contacts, with Superintendents indicating from one to five local ministries with which they were at least somewhat familiar. Out of these recommenda-

²Ibid.

tions 90 contacts were made, requesting information on older adult programs. There were 52 such programs which responded. Out of these samples the following observations and suggestions for the development of local church programs for the aging are being presented.

There is no "typical" local church program which can easily be identified. The response of one pastor in Alabama may well be speaking for the greater majority of United Methodist congregations when he wrote, "I regret that my name came to you under false pretenses, and I wish that I were doing something significant with the aging that would be of value to you, but I am not."³ With each of these churches being contacted on recommendation of a District Superintendent, it is of interest to note those who indicated, "Our church has no direct program for work with the aging."⁴ "In reality we are not doing very much."⁵ "I am sorry that we are not probably doing as much as most people are doing."⁶ The responses did range from such lack of programs through various levels of work including major cooperative programs which involve large staffs, comprehensive programs and sizeable budgets. It is our intention to indicate through such review of our findings some of the steps to be taken and

³J. E. Hastings, personal correspondence, Nov. 27, 1978.

⁴M. D. Pew, personal correspondence, Nov. 29, 1978.

⁵Marion Kline, personal correspondence, Dec. 12, 1978.

⁶A. C. Murray, personal correspondence, Nov. 29, 1978.

areas of need to be met in local communities. Many of these programs stem from the local churches' attempt to answer the question posed to Dr. Elbert C. Cole, pastor of Central United Methodist Church, Kansas City, Missouri. When Dr. Cole sought counsel from a Chicago firm for a feasibility study on their project for a home for the elderly, the report came back pointing out that only 5 percent of people over 65 lived in congregate housing of some kind. "What are you doing to serve the other 95 percent?" they asked.⁷ There will be no attempt to indicate work with the aging at the Annual Conference or denominational wide level.

The survey of local churches in the ministry with the aging will be reported under the following concerns: consciousness raising and fact finding; Golden Age Clubs; educational emphases; volunteer services; nourishment needs; health needs; day care for the elderly; transportation; maintaining personal contacts; spiritual help; housing; pre-retirement planning; advocacy for the aged; specialized services; cooperative programs; funding; major centers of ministry; and rewards.

CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING AND FACT FINDING

The survey of the churches recommended would indicate the advisability of raising the consciousness and sensitivity of the local congregation to the needs of the aging in the

⁷Van Varner, "You Don't Have to Retire From Life," Guideposts, November, 1978, p. 26.

area of the parish, and a careful investigation into the ministries which may need to be provided before actually entering into intentional programming in this area. As Dan D. Swearingin, president of Landsun Homes, has said, "Working with the aging is not a simple matter and it must be quite specific as to the diverse conditions surrounding any conclusion."⁸ An indication from a Nebraska pastor spoke for many of the responses when he said, "It (our work with the aging) was not formed by a master plan."⁹ Few responses indicated a systematic approach preceded the entry into work with the aging. Some even began with a strange turn of events, such as one church which decided on work with the aging because of its concern over the use of an empty building owned by the church, and another which entered into a housing project for the active elderly because of owning some valuable land which would not be used for future building, but over which the church desired to keep control.

There are a few indications of such consciousness raising events being held through the sponsorship of homes for the aged, annual conferences, and seminaries. Such work is being done, for example, by The United Methodist Home of Topeka, Kansas. Their expertise is being offered to clergy of their area as well as to seminary students. Good Samaritan Hospital of Phoenix, Arizona, is also offering

⁸D. D. Swearingin, personal correspondence, Dec. 1, 1978.

⁹Chester Johnson, personal correspondence, Dec. 20, 1978.

such workshops to both clergy and layity of area churches. Such events are being found increasingly held throughout the country, seeking to help pastors and local congregations understand this newer area of ministry.

There is also developing the emphasis within the area of ministry with the aging for the local study of need, so that the programs can be tailored to actual conditions. George C. Kramer, Jr., pastor of First United Methodist Church, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, gives example of this approach when he indicated his method of action upon entering into that pastorate. He first sought to define the community to which First Church needed to minister, and identify the needs indicated by that study.¹⁰ Churches that utilize this manner of study seek to develop programs which will meet specific needs found in their individual settings. They do not attempt to develop programs out of personal interests, or out of erroneous suppositions.

Increasingly the local churches are finding help in developing work with the aging from studies being made by annual conference agencies. One example of this is the comprehensive study offered by the Division of Health and Welfare of the North Texas Annual Conference, dated May 29, 1978. Valuable assistance is available through such studies and recommendations. It is not necessary, nor advisable, for local churches to enter into this phase of ministry with-

¹⁰G. C. Kramer, Jr., personal correspondence, Nov. 29, 1978.

out seeking guidance and information, as a review of the replies would indicate.

GOLDEN AGE CLUBS

The most popular form of ministry indicated in the survey of the local churches reporting work with the aging was the "Golden Age" club format. Of the churches responding, 70 percent indicated some form of this activity, and others may not have reported such programs, choosing rather to highlight a ministry they considered more unique. In each of these the emphasis was on the need for fellowship on the part of the elderly, many of whom live alone. Roavene Clock, Parish Worker of First United Methodist Church, Tacoma, Washington, expresses the concern in this way, "The real purpose of such a group is to allow the senior citizens to become better acquainted with each other in the true spirit of 'fellows of the same ship.'"¹¹ Mrs. Clock also emphasized the need for unstructured conversation, "visiting," for those participating in the programs. A similar program of the Palm Heights Church, San Antonio, Texas, allows at least thirty minutes of visitation prior to the meal, and the Drop-In Center of the First Church, Ventura, California, stresses quiet conversation as an important part of their program. (These, and all other churches included in this study are United Methodist.)

A review of the responses indicate an even division as

¹¹Roavene Clock, personal correspondence, Nov. 28, 1978.

to the frequency of fellowship gatherings. Some choose to meet once a week, while others meet on the monthly basis. Two of the more complete programs have regular activities two days a week. The sizes of the groups also vary greatly, with no indication as to the cause of such variation. One group in Normandale, Oklahoma, has over 150 participants in their monthly activities, while another program in California has an average of 19. One church in San Antonio, Texas, has chosen to limit the number who can be dues paying members of their club for what they consider to be the sake of their program, but did not indicate what that limit might be. They have placed this limitation, however, only on non-church members desiring affiliation.¹² This was the only instance reported in which such limitation was present.

When the ministry with the aging is centered in the "club" concept, the scope of activities is very similar. A meal will usually be a central activity in the gathering. Provisions for the food range from each individual bringing their own lunch, pot-luck sharing, or a meal which is prepared by others. Some programs emphasize the nutritional needs of the elderly through the nature of the meal as an adjunct to the fellowship, especially when the group meeting is weekly. Others emphasize the psychological and esthetic place of the meal in the life of the participants. The pastor of the Palm Heights Church, San Antonio, Texas,

¹²Henry Holloway, personal correspondence, Dec. 5, 1978.

points out, "I might add here we use good china, good silver, cloth table cloths, and elaborate table decorations. For many this is their only outing of the month."¹³ A great many of the weekly or monthly meetings include some time for crafts, either for the benefit of the individual or toward a bazaar time when money might be realized for either the support of the club program or for some selected charity. Programs, ranging from helpful talks by local authorities to slides of travels, are indicated in every program. Many of the groups use their own members extensively in these presentations. Game time is also indicated at most of the meetings, with choices dependent upon the facilities available and the interest of the group. Special days are emphasized in a great many instances, with the normal national holidays included, and with some other additional emphases, such as a periodic birthday celebration.

Closely allied with the senior citizens club programs, and often growing out of its participants, is the trip activity. Maraline Meyer, who directs the program at St. Matthews Church, Belleville, Illinois, considers such trips most essential to their program. Her conviction is, "The biggest thing that keeps them interested and where we pick up new members are the trips."¹⁴ Reports indicate frequency of such trips from two times a year, quarterly, bi-monthly

¹³W. B. Hiller, personal correspondence, Nov. 29, 1978.

¹⁴Maraline Meyer, personal correspondence, Dec. 13, 1978.

and "frequently." Distances range from within the city to one program led by Ms. Meyer which transports their members from Illinois as far as Georgia, Nova Scotia, the Ozarks and Missouri. Most trips for the average clubs are directed to such places as art museums, historical sites, special exhibits in the area, botanical gardens and theatres.

The conscious involvement of younger aged persons in the senior citizen's program was stated by several groups. The presentation of the entertainments would often involve this age variation, especially with youth groups. In others the club activity was sponsored by the United Methodist Women of the local church who were present either as providers of the meal or as hostesses, mingling with the participants. A church in Okolona, Mississippi, and one in Ventura, California, indicated at least a part of their work with older adults included persons in programs who were of younger years. This is predicated on the belief that many older adults do not have the opportunity to share with younger generations as much as they would desire.

First Church, Hayward, California, has developed an interesting adaptation of the usual club program by extending various activities over a five day a week schedule. In cooperation with the Social Service Bureau of the East Bay, they have sponsored the Senior Activity Center with specific activities for each day. Monday has been reserved for crafts, Tuesday for singing and a movie, Wednesday for folk dancing, Thursday for card games and Friday for bingo

parties. For a small donation and with advanced reservations, a light lunch is provided daily.

A sidelight of interest is the naming of the groups, which gives identity to the activity somewhat separate from the general church program. The name "Golden Age Club," which has been widely used, is still prevalent. Some churches have identified the ministry more directly with such names as "Senior Citizens' Program," "Senior Activity Center," or more specifically with the church or area as "Sleepy Hollow Senior Citizens' Activity Center." There is a movement to select designations more unique, such as MTOP (Ministry to older Persons), SOC (Seniors of Centenary), 205 Club (address of the church), XYZ (extra years of zest) and Tri-F (no explanation given). Some names indicated the factor of being elderly, such as "Silver Years" and "ARM" (Active Retired Men). However, a number of the names seek to change the accepted concepts of aging with the use of "Keen-Agers," "Super Adults," "New Life Club," and "Young at Heart." A further study in depth on the psychological factors of activity group names for the older adults would be of great interest and enlightenment.

EDUCATIONAL EMPHASES

One emphasis in the ministry of the local church with the aging that is present, although in a much less intentional manner than that of fellowship and leisure time activities, is that of the continuing education of elders. This

can range from a sophisticated school serving the community, such as that provided by St. Luke's Church, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, to the simplest concept of intentionally including programs of learning in the weekly or monthly club dinner. The concept is the same even though the formats may not be at all similar.

The place of continuing education in the life of the older adult is well defined in recollections of Joseph T. Shackford who was a part of the guiding team which founded St. Luke's school.

In launching the School we became mindful that it could further the cause of its basic idea at several levels: (1) The first consideration was the people already living in retirement without adequate opportunity for challenging, creative activities that give zest and enthusiasm to life. (2) As the image of aging was in poor repair across Oklahoma City community, as, indeed, in American society at large, exposure of the vital community leaders to interested and creative older adults in the School would help to change their misconceptions of the whole nature of the human personality in its later years. (3) In keeping with the earlier mentioned concept of the "three thirties" of the emerging human life cycle in our civilization, the countless persons who now must prepare for creative living in their later years needed the opportunity and stimulation to get ready for such an experience--the "third thirty years." Accordingly, people immediately approaching retirement would have a center in which they could already become oriented by taking a day or even a few hours each week from their work to become accustomed to the creative use of their approaching years and developing skills and interests to this end. Also, some with long years ahead for preparation, such as housewives with children in school and others, would be provided opportunity of learning creative skills as in the many arts offered in the School, to develop those creative habits which might persist throughout all

their years.¹⁵

These concepts can become the basis of the continuing education program of any local church as it seeks to minister to the aging.

St. Luke's School of Continuing Education is held one day a week, September through May, being divided into two semesters. Depending upon the nature of the class, the sessions range from one to three hours each. A typical semester will have over 70 subjects offered, with over 1500 persons from the church and community enrolled. Subjects may range from Archeology to Beginning Folk Dancing, with The Prophets, Death and Dying and Consumer Protection also among those included. Such programs of continuing education through the local church are intended to be of a wide community service and of the highest quality.

More modest programs for continued learning are indicated by those churches where intentionally, whatever the format of their work with the aging, there is included presentations which aid the elderly in relating to themselves and their society more adequately. Such subjects, reflecting the needs of the participants, are presented by police, firemen, doctors, lawyers, bankers, social security representatives and consumer advocates, among others. Book reviews and studies, including Bible studies, are a part of this continuing education if chosen for more than entertainment

¹⁵J. T. Shackford, "An Idea is Born," mimeographed reflections, 1975.

value. One program, The Shepherd's Center in Kansas City, Missouri, divides its continuing education presentations into a more structured "Adventures in Learning" and a less structured "Life Enrichment" program.¹⁶ The Lakeside Elder Adult Project of Ft. Wayne, Indiana, is another example of dividing the presentations into what is called "Learning Adventures," "Craft Adventures," "Travel Adventures," and "Elder Artisans." Whatever the structure, the emphasis is on the continuation of the older adult in learning and expanding of life.

A number of the local church programs are typified by the South Yarmouth Church in Massachusetts, which has chosen to structure its programs so that the older adult is not particularly identified. In these programs the elderly are seen only as a part of total church ministry, even though some of the areas of that program are supported primarily by this age group. One factor of this style of programing would be to integrate the older members into the mainstream of the congregational life, but it also risks the danger of not presenting types of learning experiences which would address themselves more specifically to the needs of the older adult. Such programing would require special sensitivity and evaluation.

The more fully developed programs of continuing education evidence a close relationship of the local church with

¹⁶Varner, pp. 27-28.

community resources. It was shown, for example, that the St. Luke's School of Continuing Education has utilized nearly 4,000 community leaders in a fifteen year period. Other such programs are directly related to state educational institutions of the area, or other public agencies. Often there are groups of retired persons within the area who would be a resource for such leadership for local church programs in older adult education.

Local churches which would see an organized continuing education program as being beyond their capabilities could at least provide their older adults with reading matter which would speak to their needs. Some churches provide subscriptions to such publications as "Mature Years," or to such area publications as "Delaware Senior Citizen" which keep the older person aware of what is being done in areas of their interests and what is being written about these needs. Simple as they are, these steps would help the older adult remain informed and involved. Learning does not depend wholly on format nor hours spent in the activity.

VOLUNTEER SERVICES

Particular comments in two responses of local churches indicate the need for the older adult, especially the retired, to continue a feeling of worth and value in the community. Roavene Clock, from Tacoma, Washington, has said, "The need to be needed is the greatest need of our senior citizens."¹⁷

¹⁷Clock, Nov. 28, 1978.

Maraline Meyer, working in Belleville, Illinois, said, "It's important that we keep our senior citizens busy and constantly let them know they are loved and needed."¹⁸ The fulfillment of this sense of need has been evidenced in the involvement of the older adult in volunteer programs. Many of the local churches have included this facet of activity in their programs. However, the results have not always been positive. Jane Kincaide, working in Lexington, Kentucky, has noted in her experience that it is easy for an older adult group to become ingrown and lacking in concern for others. Even such things as offering transportation to other older persons in need seem difficult for many to do.¹⁹ As valid as this observation may be, the inclusion of the volunteer activities is indicated in most of the programs in some form.

Some of the churches have a rather unstructured manner of using the services of their older adults. These activities are often helping with the church office, especially the bulk mailing, or doing sewing either as altar guilds or for needy children, or involving the men in pre-Christmas toy repair projects and emergency service for the needy, or other rather obvious areas of need within the congregational life. Some of the larger programs have the volunteer work well organized into such activities as Meals-on-Wheels, Handyman Service, Companion Aid, Wheels that Care (transportation).

¹⁸Meyer, Dec. 13, 1978.

¹⁹Jane Kincaide, personal correspondence, Nov. 28, 1978.

tation), and similar areas. It would be indicated by the responses that the better the service is structured the more effective it is in involving persons in the activity.

The nature of the structuring of volunteer work may also relate to the sense of importance placed upon the service. While many churches use older adults in visitation to shut-ins and others of need, the Cudahy Church in Wisconsin adds to the meaning of this service with the consecration of the volunteers in a Morning Worship service. Other volunteer programs could possibly profit from such an action before the entire congregation.

The involvement of the volunteer older adult with projects including other age groups in the church was stressed by the St. Matthews Church, Belleville, Illinois. One such project is the annual youth fund raiser in which many of the retired men give aid.²⁰ Others intentionally involve the older members into the major projects of the general groups of the congregation.

Smaller churches may find that relating the retired persons of their local congregations to the various volunteer programs in the community would be a way to offer opportunities for involvement in instances when the local church itself cannot structure large enough volunteer activities to engender a response. Almost every community has the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) which is seeking participants.

²⁰Meyer, Dec. 13, 1978.

An investigation further within most communities would usually indicate numerous other agencies, such as hospitals, which are seeking volunteers, both men and women, into their programs. Making the retired persons aware of the opportunities available to them and the means to apply for them would be a great help in the primary steps of volunteer activities through the local church ministry.

One area of volunteer service which is being overlooked in many of the churches is that of the involvement of the older adults in the total leadership roles of the congregation. The emphasis has often been on the necessity to involve youth in leadership to the extent that persons of older years are given the message that they are no longer being needed or wanted. Ron Wanless of the Cudahy Church expresses a position little found in other reports when he states, "We are currently working on making sure elderly people are involved in the decision making process in our Church."²¹ This facet in the ministry with older adults is another which needs to be kept in proper perspective.

The involvement of the older adult in volunteer activities is summed up in the statement of the Interfaith Program for the Elderly of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The cover of their flyer states, "Faith People Helping Older Adults Help Themselves." The older person has much to offer his or her community, but that offering for most people must be expressed

²¹ Ron Wanless, personal correspondence, Nov. 27, 1978.

through a structured program. The effective local church ministry for the elderly include such activities.

NOURISHMENT NEEDS

An element in the ministry with the aging in some centers is the recognition that, for any of several reasons, there may be some people in the area who are suffering from the lack of good nutrition. If such a need exists, often a number of local churches have instigated action to respond. One form of response is in the opening of a center for congregate feeding, in which those who need the service come, or are brought, to the center each day. Because of the cost of such a program, since many of the recipients cannot afford to pay their full share, and the need for staff in the preparation of daily meals, these projects would be beyond the scope of most volunteering. The inclusion of congregate daily feeding programs in ministry to the aging has usually been in conjunction with the nutritional program under what is currently known as Title VII of the Older Americans Act of the federal government. This type of activity would need local instigation, and often a local church, or a group of churches will take the initiative in making the contact with the proper governmental agency. The intention of such congregate feeding programs is quite different from the intentional fellowship which centers in the weekly or monthly club gathering.

This is not to imply the daily congregate feeding pro-

gram does not have its additional values, such as fellowship. This sharing with others is certainly a part of the daily gathering, with special emphases also included. These might be the observance of holidays and birthday dinners with appropriate decorations, or other special emphases as the group may initiate. There are a few pastors who indicated that either once a week or on special occasions they also held a chapel service prior to the meal to which the participants might come if they so desire.

Another form of the daily ministering to the nutritional needs of the elderly is the Meals-on-Wheels program for the home-bound. Although these programs usually include anyone who needs prepared food regularly regardless of age, most of those receiving this help are elderly. Since such programs are often locally established and often locally funded, there is little standardization among this area of ministries. At times a group of churches have provided the service, while in other instances hospitals have been responsible with churches aiding in furnishing drivers. In some communities the Meals-on-Wheels program has been maintained without any involvement on the part of the churches, but with the churches encouraging members to enroll as helpers on their own, or assisting those in need of the program to register for the services.

In several instances the concern for the nutritional needs of the elderly has led to wider programs for the aging. The rather extensive ministry of the Downtown Project for

Older Persons in Cleveland, Ohio, uses a good nutrition as the nucleus for the numerous other supportive services it offers, such as education, transportation, shopping assistance and others.²² The nationally known Shepherd's Center program of Kansas City, Missouri, had much of its impetus when five retired men of Central Church chose to spend their time starting a Meals-on-Wheels program for their area. The sensitivity and observation of needs which were opened by these immediate ministries gave birth to much more complete programs through those who cared in the local church.

HEALTH NEEDS

Closely allied with the ministry in the area of nutrition is the response to the total health needs of the elderly. An example of the inclusion of this type of ministry in a local church program is the Lefler Memorial Church of Omaha, Nebraska. They have worked with the Visiting Nurse Association to the extent that the VNA uses an office at the church from which the total work of that agency emanates for the entire neighborhood. The nurse is present at the weekly meetings of the Senior Citizens and maintains regular checks on those participating, if the participants so desire.²³ Other churches have maintained a close relationship with area medical persons or clinics and provide periodic checks for the participants in their senior adult programs in this

²²Publication of First Church, Cleveland, Ohio, n.d.

²³Johnson, Dec. 20, 1978.

manner.

It is indicated in some of the responses that the concern for the physical well-being of the members is stressed through a Keep-Fit time at regular meetings of senior clubs. This activity is often led by a qualified physical education instructor who has done some work in the area of the aging and health. Another mode of helping with the physical needs of members is the reminder of any local telephone service available, such as one community's "Dial-a-Health" service, which puts the individual in contact with any medical service the individual might need or any medical information desired.

St. Paul's Church, Wichita, Kansas, is an example of ministry to the elderly in the field of health services to those who are in their own homes. Under the title "People's Alternative Home Health Care," they have joined with the Mennonite Church in offering this kind of health service.²⁴ The various modes of ministry for health needs are many, but the intentionality of such ministry is most important if the local church is to include such a concern in responding to the needs of the elderly.

The results which have been expressed from the Omaha, Nebraska, ministry mentioned above are of interest. Chester Johnson states:

Prior to this program our people were constantly in the hospital for various complaints. Our "hospitalizations reported" in the Church Bulletins

²⁴C. J. Chipman, personal correspondence, Nov. 29, 1978.

show a marked decrease in hospitalizations and then most of them are non-participants.²⁵

DAY CARE FOR THE ELDERLY

One of the more recent areas of ministry to the elderly sponsored by local churches is that of the Adult Day Care Center. Such a ministry is conducted in Villa Park, Illinois, under the sponsorship of five area churches. The purpose of the program is stated in this way:

Day care for the elderly is a program designed to provide social contact and stimulation, and personal care during the day for the frail, moderately handicapped or slightly confused person over 60, in a Christian atmosphere . . . for the person who cannot manage completely on his own and/or whose family cannot provide the constant care and attention needed so as to enhance that person's emotional and physical well-being.²⁶

Meals in this program at Villa Park are served mornings and noons, with snacks provided during the day. Activities are encouraged such as exercises, arts and crafts, reality reminders, entertainment and religious interludes. Transportation is provided if necessary, and a daily fee per hour is charged, averaging about \$10.00 per day.

Another such program is offered under the name of "Senior Health Improvement Program" (SHIP) as a cooperative endeavor of church and community agencies. This ministry is for those below the poverty level, and so qualifies for

²⁵Johnson, Dec. 20, 1978.

²⁶Leslie Cunningham, mimeographed statement of Adult Christian Care, n.d.

Title XX funding at present. Again breakfast and lunch are provided with the program stressing nursing and occupational therapy in a daily setting. A similar activity is being provided in Ventura, California, in which a day care program for adults is included once a week in connection with another type of drop-in center. The intention of this ministry is to give occasional social contact to the home-bound and relief to the other members of the family giving the constant care. There is little evidence of this type of ministry through the local churches as yet. It may be more common in the future as churches realize the needs which are present in their communities and the governmental funding available.

TRANSPORTATION

Some form of response to the need for transportation for the elderly appears in many local church reports. This need usually surfaces as the age and physical condition of the individuals change, and is also present currently among some of the older widows who had never learned to drive during their younger years. It has been noted that regardless of the level of excellence of the various programs being offered to the elderly, many of those most needing the programs will not participate without some mode of transportation being offered. Edith Sias, of Old South Church, Reading, Massachusetts, notes, "Having transportation makes this program survive."²⁷ Jane Kincaide of Centenary Church,

²⁷ Edith Sias, personal correspondence, Nov. 28, 1978.

Lexington, Kentucky, voices the same problem in saying, "There is one problem they have faced and have depended on others for and that is transportation."²⁸ These references are in direct relationship to the special activities for older adults sponsored by the various churches. Most of the arrangements for transportation identified were either for the weekly or monthly senior citizens' meetings and/or for the worship and other events being held at the local church. The next most noted transportation outreach was providing the means of travel for special trips for the older adults. These were usually done with church owned buses or vans.

One variation of the transportation ministry is the use of older adults to provide private transportation for others who are in need of this service. Where these services have been mentioned, there has been a recognition of wider needs for transportation, such as for shopping, medication visits, and other similar events. As has been noted earlier, some groups have found it difficult to find older adults who are willing to participate in offering to drive. There is no evidence at present as to why this may be true.

A service that a number of churches mentioned is the listing of public or community bus service available. A number of areas are offering transportation service which comes to the door on request and delivers the person to his destination for some fee. As much as these community

²⁸Kincaide, Nov. 28, 1978.

services are advertised, there is still the possibility that some older adults may yet be unaware of the total scope of these services or the manner in which they might utilize them. Churches are including such information in their ministry to the aging.

MAINTAINING PERSONAL CONTACTS

Much of the programing already identified is directed to those who in some way are able to come to a center and participate in the events. Many of the churches are also very aware of those who are not so mobile, who are shut-ins or in nursing homes. In these instances the ministry must be taken to them. Only one church in the total reporting indicated a high level of participation by the pastor or pastors, with the rest emphasizing teams of lay callers. In each instance the necessity of systematic files and assignments with reports was emphasized, so that effective ministry could be accomplished. The nature of the systems varied, but that which was effective locally was devised.

One ministry which is direct and requires the least complicated planning is a telephone contact with shut-ins. A number of variations were noted, some using shut-ins to call shut-ins, and others using the active members to contact the shut-ins, thus bringing to the elderly a sense of the continuing ministry of the church. Information gained in these calls is transfered to the church office for action when required. The next step in the ministry of contact is

the visitation by persons or teams. This does require a more detailed organization of files and assignments than the telephone contact, and it may require more personnel as well. Again, the value of identifying these visitors and consecrating them to their work can be important. Some churches organize these workers into groups with specific designations, such as Care Calling, Caring Ministry, or PALS (People and Love). The smaller congregation or one with very few shut-ins may find one person or a couple who will dedicate themselves to this ministry sufficient to achieve the goal.

In order to facilitate the effectiveness of this home visitation, Hillcrest-Bellefonte Church in Wilmington, Delaware, has outlined the following points for their visitors:

1. Attempt to discover exactly what the needs are.
 2. Assure the people of our love and concern for them.
 3. Where considered helpful, take a hot dish or some other foods.
 4. Report back to the Pastors and the Committee their finding.
- Some things that might be needed are:
1. Companionship
 2. A hot meal once a day.
 3. Someone to help keep the house clean and neat.
 4. Someone to take the person or persons to doctors, etc.
 5. Someone to help them and carry them to get food, etc.²⁹

An emphasis that is not generally noted is given by Francis W. Carlson, of Middletown, New York. It is the value of having the same person or persons continuing the contacts with a specific shut-in. This gives the person being visited a continued relationship to someone from the church that can

²⁹G. W. Cuff, personal correspondence, Nov. 28, 1978.

build an understanding and sharing.³⁰ That may be debated by others who believe a wider series of contacts are preferred.

SPIRITUAL HELP

Either the recognition of the continuing spiritual needs of the elderly is assumed, or many of the local churches are ignoring this phase of ministry. Joseph H. Albrecht, pastor of the Lakewood Church, Lakewood, Ohio, says,

More often than not, the church is the all consuming thing to them (the elderly), especially if they are living alone. We have a large task in the church to give them strength and guidance as they live their remaining years on earth.³¹

The needs older adults are facing spiritually are for many truly unique and need the strength and help the church alone can offer.

Besides having special Sundays when the condition of aging is lifted up in presentation to the total congregation, many churches also enter into spiritual ministry in institutions, such as nursing homes. Reports indicate this may be by either a pastor or some lay group of the church. More instruction is needed to make these times of help and value to those receiving this ministry. Numerous indications were in the reports which either included regular or special times of devotions at the weekly or monthly meetings of the senior citizens' clubs. Most ministers and lay persons are

³⁰F. W. Carlson, personal correspondence, Nov. 28, 1978.

³¹J. H. Albrecht, personal correspondence, Nov. 30, 1978.

ill-prepared for this kind of ministry, attesting to the newness of the area of need.

Intentional ministry in the home is included by many churches. This may range from instructions to visitors to include a word of prayer to the taping of worship services and having them delivered to the homes. One interesting variation of this ministry is offered by the St. Paul's Church, Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania. This church cooperates in a revolving broadcast with five other churches of the community. It is planned that once a year the broadcast would fall on a June communion Sunday. Teams are sent out into the parish with consecrated elements to the homes of the shut-ins on that morning. Bulletins and copies of the hymns are also included. When the congregation shares in the worship, the three or more persons in the home do the same. When the elements are distributed, those in the homes join in the receiving. Reports Pastor Nickel, "We have been engaged in this ministry for two years and the response of visitors and shut-ins has been enthusiastic. Most say that they felt as though they were in church again."³²

HOUSING

Some local churches are including a form of housing for the elderly within their ministries. Basically there are three areas of this need. There are those within our society

³²F. A. Nickel, Jr., personal correspondence, Nov. 28, 1978.

who do not desire to live in their own separate facilities and can well afford to pay for a congregate type of housing. At the other end of the economic spectrum there are those whose income is such that they need assistance to live in any self-respecting circumstances which provide acceptable housing. Then there is the middle group in which the level of income does not qualify the persons for government subsidy, but neither permits sufficient money to allow for selective housing of their free choice. This is the group Dan Swearingin, on behalf of the Landsun Homes, calls the "Forgotten Americans." He makes the appeal for the church to respond to these, whom he believes, have loved and supported their church for many years.³³ However, few local churches seem interested in this level of housing, and so it has become the area of ministry left almost entirely to the Annual Conferences, if anything is being done at all by the church. This would also be true of responding to the needs of the affluent elderly in the field of housing.

The area in which local churches are found in housing is that of government backed and subsidized housing for the moderate to low income elderly. Some have opted for the ecumenically sponsored projects, as exemplified by the Ingle-side Home of Wilmington, Delaware, in which local United Methodist churches joined with Presbyterians and Episcopalians. Other instances indicate the concern arising within a

³³Swearingin, Dec. 1, 1978.

local church and then the project being shared with the Annual Conference and the General Church. This was the route through which First Church, Newark, New Jersey, moved in seeking to establish Wesley Towers. This project was underwritten through federal programs.

More independently, the Los Arcos Church, of Scottsdale, Arizona, chose to become a sponsor of retirement housing, but also under federal funding of FHA, Title 236. This was for elderly persons of moderate to low incomes who were capable of caring for themselves. Through other government funding projects, additional subsidy has been available for a portion of these residents if the rent requires more than one-third of their income. In the flyer for the Hacienda de Los Arcos the statement is made:

Under the sponsorship of the Los Arcos United Methodist Church . . . the Hacienda de Los Arcos represents the very finest retirement housing for the active elderly. The project is built under Federal Housing Administration Title 236, which offers housing for those qualified persons who are in the moderate and low income brackets. Applications are accepted without regard to race, religion or national origin.

At any level and with a variety of sponsorships, local churches are increasingly joining with government programs which attempt to deal with the housing needs of the elderly.

PRE-RETIREMENT NEEDS

There was a noticeable lack of reference in the ministry to the aging at the local church level of any reported program to prepare persons for their latter years. One

reference indicated a local church supplying facilities for a series of pre-retirement seminars sponsored by a state agency, but there was no reference to an on-going ministry in this area. Investigations have indicated very little being done anywhere by local churches for those facing retirement. There is a serious lack of materials available for this type of program even when sought. Earl Grimsby, who has worked in the area of the aging for some years, does list six factors of pre-retirement planning in general which he considers important: (1) economic aspects; (2) skills in use of time; (3) finding personal satisfactions and identity; (4) discovering and developing skills in sharing; (5) the importance of good health and ability to adjust to changes and limitations; and (6) development of skills in learning about and the utilization of public and community resources.³⁴

Into this void on behalf of the particular stance of the church, Beverlene Kiekel has done some review in relating pre-retirement planning to the Christian faith and the ministry of the church. She is preparing a guide entitled "You Will Receive a Gift" which will address this facet of life from the viewpoint of faith. The Epworth Church in Phoenix, Arizona, is one example in which regular seminars on pre-retirement planning are being developed for a parish which is mainly middle to younger age families.

³⁴E. G. Grimsby, personal correspondence, Nov. 11, 1978.

ADVOCACY FOR THE AGED

Advocacy is an area of ministry largely ignored or avoided by the local church in seeking to enhance the life of the elderly. It may take some courage to foster activities which would mirror the statement by Edward Peet of Glide Urban Center of San Francisco: "We have tried to change systems under which seniors live and go beyond 'band aid' ministrations."³⁵ More specifically, George C. Kramer, Jr., pastor of First Church, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, says,

I believe it is imperative that a pastor of a central city church not only be involved in responding to the needs of persons within his own congregation, but also he can be a key leader in the overall response to the community of older persons and their needs.³⁶

There is evidence in some newsheets published by local churches, dealing with the work of the senior citizens, that an attempt is being made to alert these elderly persons to sources of advocacy available to them, such as in the Cudahy-St. Francis Interfaith Newsletter in Wisconsin, but there is little evidence that churches themselves are ministering in this field as yet.

SPECIALIZED SERVICES

A few of the reports on local ministry to the aging have indicated the inclusion of specialized services for the elderly. Usually such programs have been very limited in their

³⁵E. L. Peet, personal correspondence, Nov. 29, 1978.

³⁶Kramer, Nov. 29, 1978.

scope and have sought to respond to rather obvious local needs. Some of these specialized ministries have included legal help, counseling on personal problems, and other areas of need that might surface. The inclusion of such ministries will depend on the presence of identifiable need and the availability of professional help locally. Those programs which include such services indicated a slight fee being charged.

COOPERATIVE PROGRAMS

One factor which has been repeated in the responses is the cooperative nature of the ministry with the aging entered into by many United Methodist local congregations. In order to meet some of the evidenced needs of the elderly, the manpower and finances of more than one congregation is needed, often resulting in interdenominational work. Such cooperation extending to governmental agencies is also evidenced, with the work of the Jefferson United Methodist Church in Jefferson, Louisiana, as an example. Most of the work entered into by this congregation in the area of the aging is done in cooperation with the Jefferson Council on Aging.³⁷

Others, such as the Mobile Meals Service of Scottsdale, Arizona, are accomplished through the cooperation of a number of churches of various denominations, or in conjunction with other service organizations of the community. The local congregation can often enter into effective ministry

³⁷C. B. Herr, Jr., personal correspondence, Dec. 11, 1978.

with the aging which requires greater resources than one congregation can muster, either in leadership or funding, through a number of cooperative relationships within its community.

FUNDING

It is evident that funding is no small part of an effective ministry with the aging. Nutrition centers, housing, paid staff, professional instructors, transportation and other factors are not inexpensive. Charles Swadley, from the Sleepy Hollow Church in Falls Church, Virginia, is an example of a program which went after foundation support as well as financial help from service groups known for their funding of programs, the Conference Board of Missions and the various governmental programs funding activities for the aging.³⁸ Many of the other responses indicated similar aid in funding of programs that would otherwise be far beyond the local church's ability to underwrite. These local churches who are serious about an effective ministry for the elderly have found that costs need not be a deterrent. These sources of funds can be found if someone is willing to seek them out.

MAJOR CENTERS OF MINISTRY

The local church desiring to begin or to make more effective a ministry with the aging may well turn to some of the

³⁸Charles E. Swadley, personal correspondence, Dec. 11, 1978.

major centers of church ministry for information. One of the best known of these would be the Shepherd's Center in Kansas City, Missouri. This example is a center in which 25 churches and synagogues cooperate in a multiple ministry offering aid in a setting of faith for almost any need which an older adult might experience. Areas of program offered include such elements as Meals-on-Wheels, Handyman Service, Companion Aid, Wheels That Care, Life Enrichment classes, Day Care Center, and Nutritional Services. The Center has also developed the Mid-America Resource and Training Center on Aging to give training to those desiring to work in the field of the aging ministries, and assisting communities across the country in developing Shepherd's Center related programs and leadership.

Another multiple service project is the Downtown Project for Older Persons, sponsored by First Church, Cleveland, Ohio. This has remained largely the ministry of First Church alone, but with a large variety of ministries within its scope. Serving the inner city, programs at this center include Meal Service, Learning sessions, Shopping Assistance, Transportation, Health Services, Occupational and Music Therapy, Legal Service, and Leisure Time Activities. The Lakeside Elder Adult Project of Ft. Wayne, Indiana, is another of the cooperative kinds of ministry entered into by several churches, but centered in the facilities of the Crescent Avenue Church, being an outgrowth of its concern. These are examples of the many multiple service ministries

with the aging throughout the states, whose programs may well inspire and aid local churches seeking to make more effective their own ministries with older adults.

REWARDS

What happens when churches intentionally and effectively engage in ministry with the aging? New life for many of the elderly is often found, or if the ministry to the individual is initiated early enough, a vibrant life can continue to develop until death. An account from the files of the Shepherd's Center may well sum up the entire satisfaction and reward.

Take the 80-plus grandfather whose harassed daughter called up to see if she could enroll him in any of the Center's activities. "I don't know what to do with him," she said. "I warn you, he's a cantankerous man. He argues constantly with my children, and absolutely refuses to come to the dinner table for his meals." The old fellow who shuffled into The Shepherd's Center that first day may have thought that he was being farmed out to some sort of day-care center where old folks played Bingo and wore funny hats, but if so, he was in for a shock. Before he himself realized it, he was caught up in the contagious atmosphere of learning and doing. He even stopped shuffling. He had to, or else be run over by the crowd rushing into the lunch room. At home, he stopped arguing and began discussing interesting topics with his grandchildren--at the dinner table. He died recently and his daughter telephoned again. "We have only happy memories of him now," she said, "thanks to The Shepherd's Center."³⁹

The Church has been called to share the Good News of the Abundant Life Jesus came to share with all the people. These are but a few examples of how local churches, alone or

³⁹Varner, p. 28.

in cooperation with other churches and community agencies,
are changing their understanding of and attitude toward the
elderly in their midst and are seeking to share that
Abundant Life with the aging.

Chapter Six

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A developmental study of the work of the United Methodist Church and its predecessors with the aging brings a number of factors into focus. The most immediate is the fact that these denominational bodies have been engaged in this work from their earliest beginnings, and have continued the concern to the present. With the action taken at the Christmas Conference of the Methodist group in 1784, seeking to raise funds for the assistance of "worn out preachers," the manner of ministry has adjusted with the changing of the needs and the times. It is true that the approach to the needs of the aged for many years was that of giving Christian consolation to those who were awaiting death. The ministry was closely aligned with that given to the poor and the needy in all age groups of the society. With the deepest of Christian charity, the churches sought to give an acceptable alternative to the public poor house, the end of so many poor elderly of a few generations ago. The concepts of the needs of the aged may not have been what we now think they should have been, but the intent and purpose can hardly be faulted. The primary avenues of ministry in this area of need were through the pension funds for the elderly ministers and their dependents, the provision for housing for the

needy elderly, both ministerial and lay, and a beginning concern expressed for more adequate old age assistance for the entire society through some governmental program.

The United Methodist bodies were caught in the same demographic explosion relative to the aging as was the rest of the society. Throughout the last half of the twentieth century the very numbers, percentages and needs of the elderly have changed so rapidly that it has been difficult to maintain adequate grip on the facts. Ministry within the church has struggled to keep pace. Even the studies of the professionals in the field of gerontology have been in conflict with each other, and have not given any clear direction to those of the church who have sought to be in the front of the development of more adequate programs for the aging. This kind of confusion has not been absent, but more stable and helpful material is now becoming accessible as ministry is expanding.

The study of both the theological premise of ministry and the gerontological findings of other disciplines give rise to various indications of concerns for the future of the ministry of the church with the aging. Perhaps the first is that of taking the work with the aging out of the narrow area of helping the poor and the needy. The United Methodist Church has moved exceedingly slow from its original concepts in this field. The ministry to the aging is still lodged structurally in the general area of Health and Welfare, even Hospitals and Homes, rather than seeing the

ministry to the aging as belonging in a parallel relationship with children's work, youth work, adult work, and family ministry. A relatively small percentage of the nearly 40,000,000 elderly are in need of nursing care or are unable to provide for their own housing, for instance, as we have seen in Chapter Three. The needs of any of these are important and must be addressed, but if this is the only concept of the ministry of the church with the aging then the great majority of the 80 percent or 90 percent who do not need these services are being neglected in other areas of concerns. The church would not think of developing youth programs only for those who are underprivileged, handicapped, or in special need. Yet this is the nature of much of the approach to the elderly today, being a carry-over from two centuries ago.

It is imperative that the church break the "Three-H Syndrome" of seeing its ministry to the aging as meeting the needs of health, housing and hobbies (leisure time). Lifting up the offer of Christ for the abundant life for all, regardless of age or condition, the emphasis needs to be placed on the quality of life for the elderly, even in the midst of changes which come. Decrease in health, lessened financial power, lack of employment position, dispersal of family, and other changes do not need to mark the end of life. However, in our past societal expectations, such responses still largely persist both among the elderly and among those of younger years. Preparation for advancing

age will be a part of the ministry of the church as well as the effective response of the elderly to their new status.

The church also has the ministry to the agencies of the society in seeking to heighten the general concepts of the aging persons among us. To date this has been left almost exclusively to the self-interest groups such as the Gray Panthers. Effective as their work has been, this does not excuse the church from making the more basic contention to the society concerning the quality of life aspect for the aging which is too often omitted by other concerned groups.

The church finds itself in conflicting roles in its ministry to the aging, as indicated in the current process involving the Pacific Homes complex in California. The trustee in bankruptcy, Richard Matthews, has accused the homes of failing to provide adequate business care in its enterprise, partially because it has been concerned for its ministry to the elderly who cannot afford expensive care, especially the minority elderly and those who have given their lives in the service of the church.¹ In the future these two factors will need to be combined if the service to the elderly in need is to be effective and sound.

The ministry to the elderly through the local congregations will need to be tailored to the local needs expressed. There have been the instances in the past where local churches have instituted such programs mainly on the

¹Richard E. Matthews, Report of the Trustee of Pacific Homes, October 15, 1979, p. 23.

basis of that which is done in other locations, or that which is expected to be the needs of the local elderly, no study having first been made. The steps needed are those of consciousness raising, fact finding, resource discovery and then program implementation.

Underlying all of these assumptions and conclusions is the basis of the ministry of the church found in the statement of Jesus in John 10:10, "I have come that men may have life, and may have it in all its fullness."² This is the emphasis on the "Abundant Maturity" theme which is the cause of the ministry and the conviction of the church. The elderly are a valid and vital part of the society, and the days of age are not wasted days, even though all is not as it once was in earlier years. The love and care of God is not lessened after age 65. This is the message and the ministry of the church.

²The New English Bible.

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ROGER M. STRESSMAN
PASTOR

FRANK ARK, JR.
ASSOCIATE PASTOR

August 25, 1978

Dear District Superintendent:

I am seeking your help in completing a study I am doing for my Doctor of Ministry work at the School of Theology at Claremont. The study is in the work of the United Methodist Church with the aging. I am in need of some information concerning local United Methodist Churches which are doing something effectively in this area of ministry.

Would you be willing to list the names and addresses of two or three churches in your Conference in which some meaningful work is being done? I have enclosed a return card for this purpose. There is some urgency in this response, since it will take some time to contact these churches and collate their replies.

We believe there is a great ministry for the Church in these coming days relative to the needs of the aging. There has been so little done in depth to establish some guidelines and suggested directions which has led me to choose this field. I do want to make it practical as well as theoretical, and so the survey of churches doing some effective ministry.

I do appreciate your cooperation. I know the District Superintendents have the ministry of the total Church so much at heart.

In His Service,



Roger M. Stressman



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ROGER M. STRESSMAN
PASTOR

FRANK ARK. JR.
ASSOCIATE PASTOR

October 8, 1978

TO THOSE SHARING IN CONCERN FOR THE AGING:

I would appreciate a little of your time in a mutual concern: The work of the Church with the aging.

I am completing my research for a Doctor of Ministry degree at the School of Theology at Claremont. My subject is the work of the United Methodist Church with the Aging. I am seeking to make this both historically helpful and practical for today.

I have been informed that you are involved in some effective program in this area of work. I would appreciate knowing more of your work, with the possibility of including it in my dissertation.

Could you supply me with any printed materials you might have concerning your programs? If the information is not included, I would appreciate some evaluation of its effectiveness with the strong points and dangers also indicated.

I realize first class postage may not be enough to cover the total cost of your sending the materials, and I am not enclosing a self-addressed envelope since you may need other size envelopes. However, I have attached a first class stamp which I trust will at least be somewhat mindful of costs.

Since I am currently working on my dissertation, I would appreciate whatever promptness might be possible in your reply.

Thank you so much for your cooperation and for sharing this mutual concern. May God bless you in the work you are doing for Him.

In His Service,



Roger M. Stressman



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ROGER M. STRESSMAN
PASTOR

FRANK ARK. JR.
ASSOCIATE PASTOR

October 23, 1978

Dear Co-worker:

It has been recommended that I contact you concerning the work you are doing relative to the aging in the Church. I trust you might be able to share some of the program with me.

I am completing my Doctor of Ministry work at the School of Theology at Claremont. The subject is the United Methodist Church and the Aging. For the conclusion of the project I intend to give suggestions as to practical programs local churches might sponsor in this area of ministry. It was for this reason one of your District Superintendents suggested I contact you.

I would appreciate any materials you might have or a description of your program. Perhaps there is someone in leadership who would be willing to take the time to gather some of this. It does not have to be in great detail, but enough so that others would catch the meaning of the program and whatever response you have had.

I have no way of knowing what might be involved in return mailing, but I am enclosing a first class stamp to begin the process!

Thank you for your interest in the ministry to the aging. I trust some of these programs might appear in print in the near future.

May God continue to bless you in this most important work.

In His Service,



Roger M. Stressman